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THE
A C T R E S S
OF THE
P R E S E N T D A Y .

“ Know you not, *Mistress*, to some kind of Men
Their Graces serve them but as Enemies ?
No more do yours ; your Virtues, gentle *Mistress*,
Are sanctified and holy Traitors to you.
Oh ! what a World is this ! when, what is comely
Envenoms *her* that bears it——.”

AS YOU LIKE IT.

“ Be thou as chaste as Ice, as pure as *Snow*, thou shalt not
escape Calumny.”

HAMLET.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR JAMES HARPER, 46, FLEET-STREET.

1817.

W. Flint, Printer, Old Bailey, London.

THE
ACTRESS
OF THE
PRESENT DAY.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARY felt herself so extremely ill all the night, that next morning she was obliged to send a note to the Manager, to excuse herself from rehearsal and the next play, as she found herself really incapable of performing; it was the first time she had ever begged to be excused, and hoped her apology would be accepted. "Well," cried Mr. P—— "poor girl, she must be really ill, or she would not send such a note."

"Oh, Sir, depend upon it," returned Mrs. Crawley with a sneer, "she is only *jealous-sick*. Only send her word she *must* perform *Angela* to-night, and my life on't she will be drest for the part, like a *blazing constellation* before six in the evening.

Mr. P——, however, did not think fit to

comply with this kind observation, but immediately changed the piece.

Miss *Thompson*, who had heard the note, and not having to play that night, immediately hastened to visit her young friend, for whom, as we have before said, she entertained a most sincere regard.

This affectionate girl found Mary exceedingly weak and dispirited. She had been weeping over the Countess's letter; her countenance pale, and her eyes quite inflamed. Miss Thompson was alarmed at her visible indisposition, and most eagerly enquired the cause.

"Read that letter," answered the invalid, "and then wonder how I can retain my senses under the unjust opprobrium, and the loss of so great a friend."

"Gracious Heaven!" cried the worthy girl, "can there exist such malevolent villainy in a human breast? Oh! my sweet girl, bear up, I conjure you, under this misfortune; a merciful Providence will, I doubt not, soon vindicate your innocence, and restore you tenfold to her ladyship's favour."

"*Never, never,*" sighed the despondent Mary: "I feel I cannot survive the shock: my heart is almost broken."

She then begged her friend's confidence, while she succinctly related to her all the disastrous incidents which had lately occurred. "Ere this, 'tis probable, I may be the innocent occasion of *one* or *more* deaths; how can I hope to be forgiven? who will believe my assertion? My fair name, the prized essence of my existence, is blasted and gone for ever! how then can I ever hold up my head again, and look the world in the face?"

"For shame, for shame," cried her friend; "guilt may well despair, but *innocence* is ever *firm*—where is your fortitude? where is your religion? If you suffer the slander of a worthless set of foes to wound your peace! by sinking under this unmerited reproach, you *confirm* suspicion, and make your enemies triumph. Come, rouse yourself, and recover your serenity; write once more to the Countess; assert your innocence; inclose Sir George's letter to you; you are justified in the sight of Heaven to vindicate yourself. He has broken the bond of your promise by a *second* attempt, and your longer silence is *crimina*. Here is pen, ink, and paper; write only a few lines, and Sir

George's infamous proposal will at once clear you with the Countess."

Miss Thompson assisted her friend to a chair, for poor Mary was almost exhausted with excessive grief; and her spirits being somewhat restored by the rational arguments and consolatory advice of her affectionate and sensible companion, she penned the following short epistle:

Mary Irwin to the Countess Delafort.

" Madam,

" Though solemnly renounced by your Ladyship, and I dare not doubt your word; despairing of ever regaining your esteem, permit the innocent victim of malice and false appearances, once more, for the last time she will ever trouble you, to deny in the face of an all-seeing Judge, the foul aspersions that have stabbed her fame. Though she has lost your friendship, she cannot live under the idea of your believing her to be the guilty and ungrateful wretch you have supposed her. This letter from Sir George will free me from that dreadful charge. I would have kept the secret, in tender respect to his lady's and your peace, had not his second attempt thus publicly exposed him-

self, and implicated me in the disgraceful and distressing consequences. I dread to enquire the event. As to the other charge, of seducing the affections of your Ladyship's honourable Nephew, he will himself, if he have the least spark of *honour* in his breast, rid me from that reproach. Thus in *self-defence* have I dared, for the last time, to intrude on your Ladyship's attention. Do not *hate*, do not *despise* me. I have not deserved it, for though my enemies may triumph in my downfall,

I shall ever remain,

Your ladyship's most grateful,
Though much injured,

MARY IRWIN."

Mary then handed Sir George's letter to Miss Thompson before she enclosed it, who having read it attentively, returned it, and said, "if this is not 'confirmation strong as proofs of Holy Writ,' I know not what can convince her."

Mary then enclosed both letters in an envelope, sealed it, and gave it to Miss Thompson to put it in the office.

"No, my dear," said that affectionate friend, "I'll set out instantly *myself* with it ;

it is but a pleasant walk, and the errand I go upon is to me the most pleasurable in life : I cannot *rest* nor *sleep* till your character is vindicated." So saying, this charming worthy girl ran down stairs, and was out of sight in a moment.

When she left Mary it was about half past twelve, and she was back from the Castle as the clock struck four. This expedition that good-natured and indefatigable creature used, knowing the anxiety our heroine would endure, till her return.

" Well, my dear girl," cried she as she entered, " cheer up. Things are not quite so bad as your fears have pictured ; but there has been a duel fought on your account, that's certain, and with *pistols,—pistols* : *I have it from undoubted authority*. The old Lord has had the fleshy part of his hip grazed, that's all, and will quit his chamber to-morrow ; but the baronet's wound has been serious, the surgeon had just finished extracting the ball as I got there : the earl was very near doing Sir George's business ; had the bullet lodged an inch lower it would have touched a vital part ; however he has been brought to his penitentials, and an open confession."

“ But the Countess,” cried Mary, “ has she got my letter, and did she return it ?”

“ No, she has kept it, and Sir George’s letter to you. I was detained a full hour there, and was she winto the house-keeper’s room, and had a wing of a pheasant, a slice of ham, and three glasses of wine ; what say you to that ? I asked first for her Ladyship’s footman, and a nice civil young man he is ; he enquired from whom I came ; I told him, and he then asked if the letter required an answer ; I informed him there was something enclosed for her Ladyship’s inspection, which most probably did ; he then brought me to the house-keeper’s room, and begged me to be seated, and he would present the letter to his lady.”

“ Well, well, and what answer ?” said Mary anxiously.

“ Have a little patience,” cried Miss Thompson, “ from the house-keeper, *Mrs. Keys* is her name, a very respectable woman, I had the whole account. Nobody blames you, but Lady Lucy’s maid, Mrs. Marlow, and young Mischief, the Nephew. All the domestics are fond of you.”

“ Well, well ; proceed.”

“ I’m coming to *Hecuba* as fast as I can

In an hour, the servant brought me this note, and said his Lady expressed herself satisfied at your letter, and would make the proper use of it. This was all, so having refreshed and rested myself, I have hurried back to ease your mind, which this note in her Ladyship's own hand, I trust, will do."

Mary opened it and read :

"The Countess Delafort is much gratified to find Miss Irwin innocent of the suspicions harboured against her. Sir George had already confessed his attempt to seduce her, which his letter now fully proves. The Countess took it directly to the Baronet, ill as he was, and demanded to see the answer ; this was luckily not destroyed, and he produced it. Miss Irwin's answer was immediately handed to the Earl and Lady Lucy, but, for the sake of future peace to her daughter's mind, she has withheld Sir George's avowal of his interested views in marriage. If his fever don't increase, there is a likelihood of his speedy recovery, and from his apparent penitence, concord, though not *happiness*, may be restored between the newly united pair. The Countess will be anxious at all times to render Miss Irwin a service ; but, from obvious *prudential* rea-

sons, her presence is no more admissible at the Castle."

"Well," exclaimed Mary, "my character, thank Heaven! is cleared in the Countess's eyes, and that's a comfort to my sinking heart."

"You must make up your mind," said her young friend, "to bear with patience the idle whispers which will be circulated, for the rumour must be spreading by this time, and the world will put different constructions on it, and Lady Sneerwell, Mrs. Candid, Sir Benjamin Backbite, and old Shark, will be busy for about a fortnight, till some fresh subject claim their attention."

"When was the *School for Scandal* last performed?" asked Mary.

"Why, my dear," answered her lively companion, "is it not rehearsed every night in our *green-room*?"

"Because I have thoughts of taking it for my benefit."

"You *must not*," returned Miss Thompson: "from these recent occurrences, it might be deemed too *personal*; better let the matter rest, and die away of itself, than revive the slumbering embers." Miss Thomp

son took tea with Mary, and then left her to her meditations.

Our heroine the next day wrote to Mrs. Forester, and gave her a full statement of all that had recently occurred to her: the answer she received was consolatory to her mind, as her conduct through the difficulties she had experienced, was approved of by that truly amiable and affectionate friend. She likewise received a letter from Mr. Percy. That worthy divine cautioned her to preserve her serenity, amid those unavoidable trials, a young and interesting female in such a profession must ever be exposed to ; never to be elated, or build on the favours of the Great, nor to be cast down by the loss of their countenance: “secure, my child,” said the good man, “the approbation of your conscience ; supplicate the universal Father of us all, for direction in all your difficulties, and repine not at his dispensations ; pour out your whole soul before him, he *sees*, he *knows*, he *searches* the inmost recesses of the heart ; make *him* your friend by a steady reliance on his mercies, and then, my dear girl, you may smile at the fleeting friendships of this deceitful

world. I wish, indeed, you had chosen a line of life less liable to temptation ; but, as there is no situation wholly exempt from it, it would be extraordinary indeed if *you* were to escape ; and the greater your virtuous abhorrence, the more complete will be your *triumph*, and the more lasting your *reward* ; the promises of our Divine Master are sure to be accomplished ; let these console you amid all your trials, and the frowns and disappointments of this transitory life cannot affect your mind, nor shake your principles and constancy. *Act well your part,*" continued this cheerful yet truly pious and reverend monitor, " through the various *tragic* scenes allotted to us frail mortals, on the *grand theatre of life* ; seek the *applause* of your own conscience, as far beyond the *plaudits* of the silly multitude ; obtain the approbation of the *Supreme Manager and Proprietor of all*, whose *critique* and *judgment* on those talents he has lent, are ever rendered in *mercy*, and your *benefit* hereafter will exceed all human calculation."

Thus fortified by the parental advice of her true friends, Mary recovered her usual composure ; she no longer considered herself *deserted*, and was prepared to meet the

idle reports and malignant whispers, which might be spread to her disadvantage, with a dignified firmness.

The report of the duel was now spread over the whole town and neighbourhood, and the supposed author of it treated with the most uncharitable censure. Old Lady Ridout, the widow of Sir Randal Ridout, a wealthy Nabob, was most devoutly inveterate, and most industrious to circulate any thing prejudicial to the interests of the theatric community. This lady, whose origin none could easily trace, had in her youth attempted the stage; but, unfortunately, her person, which was coarse, and her intellects, which were narrow, though aided by her effrontery and a private insinuating conduct, not the most circumspect, could not carry her through, and she was compelled to drop a profession, to which she had not the most distant pretensions. She therefore resolved to seek her fortune in a different line, and accepted the situation of *companion* to the lady of a general in the India Company's service, who was returning to her husband.

This young woman was not deficient in worldly cunning. She went out with a

resolution to provide for herself, nor was she very particular as to the manner how. Residing with her mistress till that lady's decease, she became the general's *mistress* ; but that officer being killed at the taking of Seringapatam, she had the art to angle dexterously ; and having baited her hook, she at length caught Sir Randal aforesaid, and after many years residence abroad, returned with him to England, and settled within a mile of the town where our heroine was engaged. Being most amply provided for at the death of the Nabob, she now in her sixtieth year divided her time between cards, scandal, and the church. Plays were her aversion, and the actors and actresses her constant theme of invective. “ I am astonished,” cried she repeatedly, “ that the magistrates will tolerate such a public *nuisance* as a *theatre*, and how any people in their senses can listen to such profane stuff, and encourage such a set of profligates : neither our sons, our *daughters*, nor our *husbands* are secure from their arts ; and even *bloodshed* and *death* is frequently the consequence of their being encouraged. For my part, ladies, I always disliked them, but I *hate* them now, and hold it a matter of con-

science to set my face against them all. If they were not bad enough before, they have a *new actress* now, who will set the whole town in arms, if we don't contrive to send her a-packing. Whenever her benefit is advertised, I shall take care to invite a large party on her night."

"I think, Lady Ridout," said Lord Brudenel, who was present, "you are rather too severe. The girl has the *misfortune* to be very handsome and very attractive; doubtless her views on Sir George Dashington were matrimonial; but the baronet's affairs being somewhat deranged, he naturally preferred Lady Lucy to an actress, for whom his passion, however strong, could never lead him so cruelly to forget his rank and connexions, as to *honourably* unite her. Actresses are very well for the hours of dalliance, and as a temporary solace; but it is the height of presumption in them, to seek to enter into our *families*. Miss Irwin is what is termed a prudent virtuous girl, for one in her profession, and will doubtless play her part wisely, nor easily surrender. Sir George was too hasty in his overtures, and we see the consequences; but I insist the girl was not to blame."

“ Oh ! I’m out of patience with her,” cried Lady Ridout ; “ an artful mercenary creature. Why, my lord, they were on the very point of eloping together ; there was a post-chaise and four waiting for them about a hundred yards from the turnpike, and they would have been in France in less than thirty hours, had not Lord Delafort luckily arrested their progress.”

“ This is more than *I* have heard,” returned his lordship.

“ Oh, there can be no doubt of it,” said her ladyship ; “ have not you heard so, Mrs. Bent ?”

“ Certainly,” replied Mrs. Bent ; “ it was all arranged, before the marriage with Lady Lucy took place ; there were relays of horses prepared on the road, to expedite their journey. This girl is so ill from her disappointment, and her concern for Sir George, that she has kept her bed ever since.”

“ *Indeed !*” cried Lord Brudenel : “ very extraordinary ! we must certainly have lost the faculty of seeing, for Sir Thomas Turton and I met her not two hours since, returning from the library, and her name is in the bills for *Mrs. Beverley*, to-morrow night.”

“ Oh ! my lord,” replied Mrs. Bent ; “ it

can't be; you must mistake her for somebody else."

"That is impossible!" cried Sir Thomas, "she is too attractive, and too lovely, to pass unnoticed; having once beheld her, it is not in nature to forget her."

"You saw her on the *stage*, I suppose, Sir," returned Mrs. Bent, "*painted* and *dressed* in her borrowed plumes, and so are in raptures with the *doll*."

"We have seen her both *on* and *off* the stage," said Lord Brudenel; "and I am bold to assert, she is more interesting by far in her ordinary costume, when accidentally met, than embellished by any stage-trappings whatever. She needs not the foreign aid of ornament."

"Dear! dear!" exclaimed Lady Ridout. "I am really sick of her name; I wish some of you, gentlemen, who are so vociferous in her defence, would contrive to take her off, and rid the town of *her* and the whole crew. —Plague on them, I've lost deal!"

"What a charitable wish!" cried Sir Thomas; "but neither Lord Brudenel, nor your humble servant, are thus inclined, unless to oblige your ladyship, and furnish your friends with a few additional comments."

“ Mrs. Bent, Sir Thomas,” cried his lordship, “ is certainly right in one particular ; there is a lady confined through illness, on Sir George’s account, and——”

“ *Who ? who ?*” exclaimed Lady Ridout, “ I long of all things to hear.”

“ Take care, my dear Lady Ridout,” replied Lord Brudenel, with an arch look, “ you will certainly lose the rubber. You know whom I mean,” said he to Sir Thomas, apart.

“ Yes ; ’tis so reported, my lord,” whispered Sir Thomas.

“ Nay, no whispers ; *who ? what ? what* is reported ?” cried the old lady ; “ do, for pity, inform us.”

“ Diamonds are trumps,” cried his lordship.

“ The deuce take the trumps,” said Lady Ridout ; “ do let me know, my lord !”

“ That’s it,” cried my lord ; “ my deuce of trumps shall take the liberty to take your ladyship’s queen of hearts.”

“ Was there ever any thing so provoking ! I’ll not touch another card, ’till I know——” cried her ladyship. The servant now announced, “ the Rev. Doctor Emerson.”

“ Doctor Emerson, your most obedient.”

cried Lord Brudenel ; “ how is your amiable daughter, Doctor ? ”

“ She is considerably better, my lord,” returned the dignitary.

“ The heat of the ball-room was excessive,” said Sir Thomas ; “ yet she persisted in going down the dance with Sir George.”

“ It was very wrong in her, that’s certain,” answered the Doctor.

“ *Hem !* ” cried Lord Brudenel.

“ *Hem !* ” echoed Lady Ridout, which was re-echoed by Mrs. Bent ; “ very wrong indeed for a young Lady so *situated*, to dance.”

“ Madam ! ” cried the Doctor.

“ I should have *mourned*, and not have *danced*,” said Lady Ridout.

“ Why, madam ? ” asked the divine in surprise.

“ In truth,” said her ladyship, “ had *I* been Miss Emerson, I should not have gone to the Castle at all.”

“ Why not ? may I ask your ladyship ? ” asked the divine.

“ I could never have endured to have seen that *false* man more.”

“ Really, Lady Ridout ; the liberties, some persons give themselves,” returned,

Doctor Emerson, evidently hurt, “in sporting with the feelings of people of condition and respectability, is unpardonable. I—I am shocked at the barbarity and malignity of such groundless rumours. Miss Emerson’s character is unimpeachable, and defies the breath of scandal. Sir George was but a mere casual acquaintance of my son, Captain Emerson, and paid no greater attention to his sister, than common politeness justified. If he had made any proposals, my daughter would have acquainted me ; but going to the ball and dancing with him, must have removed every remaining doubt on the subject.”

“Oh certainly,” cried her ladyship ; “there is *no doubt* now remaining on the subject ; but how is Sir George ? have you heard, Doctor ?”

“The ball has been extracted, and he is now in a fair way ; he is able to take the air in his carriage.”

“What mischief had this Miss Irwin, I think they call her, like to have caused !” exclaimed Mrs. Bent ; “what an artful creature !”

“Dreadful indeed might have been the consequences,” replied the Doctor ; “the Countess was much overseen, by extending

her patronage to such a person. I myself have been imposed upon by a specious recommendation in her favour, but have prohibited all intercourse for the future. It is incalculable what mischief such people cause in families of respectability and distinction, if once admitted, or in the slightest degree countenanced. I shall never forgive myself, nor can Miss Emerson, for our *mistaken condescension*."

"That poor girl's character," cried Lord Brudenel, "has been most preciousy taken to pieces."

"Character!" cried Lady Ridout. "Ha! ha! ha! defend me from an Actress's character!"

"And yet," said Sir Thomas, "they must possess feeling, or they are unfit for their profession."

"And if *unjustly* accused," cried Lord Brudenel, "it must wound their sensibility."

"Prithee don't talk of such creatures' *sensibility*," cried her ladyship, "'tis truly farcical, is it not, Doctor?"

"Oh! decidedly so," said the dignitary; "they are *nobody*, not worthy a thought: *but* for persons of *rank* and of *consideration* in the public estimation, for *them* to be tra-

duced, or their names to be treated with levity, is a degree of presumption past endurance; it is really *libellous* and *actionable*, in the truest sense."

Mrs. Bent now enquired of Lord Brudeneel, "Pray, my lord, as you are such an amateur, you must know, when do these players shift their quarters?"

"I suppose, madam, in about five or six weeks time, when their benefits are over," replied his lordship. "Why do you ask?"

"I only wish it was to-morrow they were to decamp, or rather that they had never come. They are my aversion."

"And yet, Mrs. Bent, I have frequently seen you there?"

"Indeed! well, my lord, it may be so, but I vow I don't recollect when."

"You seldom missed a night, while Miss Starrit performed."

"Oh, aye, I remember," cried Mrs. Bent. "She came from London, there was *something* to be seen, and to be endured. I was vastly entertained."

"So it appeared, for you laughed heartily during the whole play," said the noble lord.

"Who could help it? she was really so *truly comic*, there was no resisting."

“And yet, madam,” returned my lord, “there is nothing so irresistibly *comic* in the characters of *Isabella* or *Belvidera*; Miss Starrit is a Tragic Actress, not a Comedian.”

“Well, what of that, my lord,” replied this lady, “Lady Mary Minton and I were talking of Sir Peter Patrick’s and Lady Cantrell’s affair; the most ludicrous discovery: you must have heard it.”

“Not a syllable, nor do I believe a word of it.”

“Go, you infidel; but your lordship delights to differ in opinion from others. There’s no *convincing* you; that’s *your hobby*.”

“And you, madam, believe every thing you hear; and that is yours. Your reports ride upon the sightless coursers of the *air*, and are to the full as *empty*.—But *à propos* of *plays*, since you are so vastly entertained, what do you think of taking a box, when Miss Irwin’s night is announced?”

“If it will oblige your lordship?”

“*Sans doute*, madame; and if I could only prevail on Lady Ridout to take a few tickets on that night——”

“The age of *miracles* would not be past. *No, no*, my lord,” cried her ladyship; “no plays, no tickets for *me*; if you bring me any, I’ll *positively* put them in the fire.”

“I hope your ladyship may,” said the peer; “for then *positively* your ladyship should pay for them.”

“Pay for them, indeed! I would rather pay the *income* tax, than one single shilling towards a *play*. I never could endure them.”

“Hem!” cried his lordship, “*Hem!*” cried Sir Thomas, and a *hem!* with a significant look, from Mrs. Bent, reverberated.

“I readily believe you, Lady Ridout,” returned Lord Brudenel. “I never heard of persons, who, in their youth had *failed* in any profession, that could ever endure the mention of that profession again. I can instance a groom of mine, who was bred a Newmarket jockey, but having lost the match, he inveighed bitterly against all the fraternity, as the greatest rogues in existence; yet a few years after, he was detected in embezzling my corn to a very considerable amount.”

Thus ended this most brilliant and edifying conversation. Lady Ridout was silenced and felt *sore*; Doctor *Emerson* very uneasy, Mrs. Bent displeased at the peer's remarks, and that *nobleman* and his friend the *baronet* totally indifferent, whether they

were pleased or not. They dropped in but for a *lounge* ; they cared as little for our heroine's reputation as the rest ; and supported her, merely for the sake of aggravation ; nor can it be doubted that these intimate friends themselves when apart, ridiculed each other's particular failings with delicate hints, and oblique inuendoes. So much for *modern polite* conversation in a general company. *Insincerity* reigns sole mistress of the ceremonies, and the "*arbiter elegantiarum*" hands round the cup of scandal, seasoned to all palates, which is greedily swallowed, till *even-handed justice returns the poisoned ingredients to their own lips*.

The reverend dignitary had asserted the truth, when he mentioned the withdrawing of his serene countenance and friendship from poor Mary, for she had no sooner reached her lodgings, from the library, than she found a very laconic note from the doctor, couched in the following terms :

" Doctor Emerson is sorry to inform Miss Irwin, that her visits to his house will be dispensed with in future. The respect he owes to his daughter's *reputation*, and his own *dignity*, makes this resolution absolutely indispensable, and laments that so

young a woman is possessed of such depravity, as to render this intimation necessary on his part."

Our Heroine, stung to the quick with this direct insult, immediately sat down to answer it :

" Mary Irwin begs to acquaint the Rev. Doctor Emerson, that she has received his *very polite* intimation, with which she shall most cheerfully comply ; for she can duly appreciate that favour and countenance which varies as occasion suits, and flows or ebbs as the current of public rumour sets. She sincerely hopes, his *own family* may never give the doctor greater cause for uneasiness, than what she has been the innocent instrument of occasioning."

Mary, when she had dispatched this answer, began to repent of its asperity ; yet surely our candid readers will excuse a mind harassed with indignities and unmerited reproaches. She had little cause to lament the loss of that unamiable family's favour, whose condescensions were so strongly marked with *self-importance*, so very *humiliating* when conferred. She had not entirely lost the Countess's regard, and that consideration made the neglect of others the more easily endured.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next morning, when Mary entered the Green-room, the eyes of the performers were directed towards her. "*A small sword through the body,*" exclaimed Mr. Grimes, the comic actor.

"*A bullet in the thorax,*" cried Mr. Staines.

"Gentlemen, this may be very amusing to *you,*" said Mr. Briskin, with an assumed serious face; "but, I must say, you pay very little regard to the feelings of another."

"Well, thank Heaven! I am neither *young* nor *handsome*; no throats will be cut, no lives endangered, on my account. I never gave either occasion or opportunity for any man to bring *my* name in question," cried Mrs. Benson.

"I believe you, madam," said Mr. Sharpe; "and you may thank both your age and person that exempt you from such obloquy."

"You are *partial*, Sharpe, and can give a sly cut as well as any I know," returned Mrs. Benson

“Not in the least,” cried the Prompter ; “every one knows Mrs. Benson can do more with a look than others with the most laboured detail.”

“You *compliment*, young man.”

“If I did,” answered Mr. Sharpe, “it would be at the expence of truth, which I venerate.”

“Well !” exclaimed Mrs. Crawley, “I am really astonished at the deliberate intrepidity of some people’s assurance, who can appear quite calm and collected, amid all the confusion and mischief they have created.”

“Come, come, good folks,” cried Mr. P——, as he entered, “rehearse your *scandal scenes* elsewhere, you are too *severe*. Prepare to fix on your respective pieces for your benefits, let that employ your thoughts. What will *you* take, Mrs. Crawley ?”

“Dear Sir,” cried that lady, “how you distress me ! How is it possible I can determine so suddenly ?”

“Why,” cried the Manager, “you always keep chopping and changing so. Prithee fix at once, and let me recommend you to *Know your own Mind*.”

“What ! a comedy !” exclaimed she, “oh, no, Sir !”

“ Well then, *As you like it.*”

“ I *don't* like it, Sir, nor *As you like it* neither.”

“ Well ! well !” cried the Manager pettishly ; “ what is it you *do* like ?”

“ I'll take the *Grecian Daughter*,” said Mrs. Crawley. Now Mary had inadvertently said, some time before, she would choose that tragedy for her night.

“ I thought, Miss Irwin, *you* had fixed on that, for *your* piece,” said the Manager.

“ I have the *first* choice, Mr. P——,” said Mrs. Crawley, “ and I insist upon my right.”

“ Let the lady have it for *me*,” said Mary ; “ I am indifferent as to what pieces I take.”

“ The lady is right,” returned her rival, with a sneer ; “ whatever she fixes 'on, it will end in *Much ado about Nothing*, at last.”

“ I think the *Jealous Wife*,” said Miss Thompson, “ would be the best play Mrs. Crawley could fix on, with the *Mayor of Garret*. Mrs. Oakley and Mrs. Sneak she would shine in.”

This remark of Miss Thompson was a *home stroke*, for no poor husband was ever more plagued with a vexatious and jea-

lous termagant, than the very obsequious little Jeremiah Crawley. The amiable and placid wife's neck began to swell, her lips quivered, the clouds gathered on her brow, and the storm would have burst in *thunder* on the devoted head of our Heroine's friend, had not the call-boy that instant summoned her to the wing ; when rising with a masculine and tragic step, she darted a furious look at the lively girl, who, no ways intimidated, turned to the husband, and sang aloud—

‘ *Oh what pleasure would abound,
Were your wife once laid in ground !*’

“ *Amen ! to that sweet prayer !*” silently ejaculated the husband.

Mary fixed upon *Cymbeline*, with the after-piece of *Matrimony*. Miss Thompson offered her assistance in a favourite *bravura* song, and our Heroine selected *Southey's Maid of the Inn*, for recitation on that occasion. Mr. P—— approved of the choice she had made, and promised to see her pieces got up with care and attention. Her benefit was appointed the *third*, and this was accounted a peculiar mark of favour from the Manager, as the town and neighbourhood would be prepared to make up their interest

for their respective favourites, and not as yet exhausted by the repeated solicitations of successive applicants.

Mary having now full three weeks to apprise her few remaining friends, found herself quite a woman of business. The Manager's charges were heavy, but she soon found they were not the *only* expences to be incurred. She was to be accountable for the printing of her *tickets, extra bills, and advertisements*; she had to pay for *properties, supernumerary attendants, bill-stickers, and deliverers*, and a numerous train of *et cæteras*, tedious and unnecessary to mention to those acquainted with the suitable appendages belonging to a large theatre; and we may naturally conclude, a *novice* in the profession, as she was, could not escape the many impositions usually practised on those occasions. To avoid running in debt, she paid every demand upon the spot; and she plainly perceived the twenty guineas her good friend Nathan Barclay, the quaker, had presented her, would go but a short way to liquidate every call upon her; *she* therefore held it a fortunate circumstance, that she had it partly in her power to answer those contin-

gencies, which, were her night to fail, she would otherwise be unable to discharge.

In the interim, previous to her benefit being announced, the Honourable William Neville became of age, and Lord Delaport reluctantly resigned this unruly twig of fashion to his own guidance, for *discretion* he had none. Greek and Latin for him had ever been *a cat and a fiddle*, and Doctor Erasmus Leader, that profound scholar and judge, who had long despaired of making any impression upon his young pupil's mind, now *declared*, on being presented with a living of four hundred a year in the young gentleman's gift, that the Honourable William Neville was *finished* in his education, and totally beyond *his* power of instruction. In this he asserted nothing but the literal truth in either sense, for his late pupil now became more than ever indefatigable in his researches after the *newest* fashions, was deeply learned in the science of the outward embellishments of his head and person, and an acknowledged critic in the articles of *taste*; though he had never read Longinus nor Burke, on the Sublime and Beautiful, he could accurately analyse the distinguishing properties of the Cream of Violets and the Olympian Dew; and

hold a dissertation on the essential difference between *Rowland's Macassar*, and *Prince's Russia Oils*. His dressing-room was his study, the toilet his reading-desk, and his hours for *contemplation* and *reflection* passed before an elegant *mirror* which adorned his room. These propensities, however ridiculous and contemptible, were harmless, compared to the vicious career, into which this ape of fashion shortly launched, now that he became possessed of eighty thousand pounds, and an estate of nine thousand pounds per annum ; but of this in its place.

Sir George Dashington by this time was perfectly recovered, and tranquillity restored for the present, between him and his noble help-mate. To prove this reconciliation, and to silence the tongue of slander, from which neither *royalty* nor *nobility* can hope to escape, they now appeared together in public, with the most seeming cordiality ; and the Countess made it her request, that they would honour the Theatre with their presence on the night Miss Irwin acted, and especially on her ensuing benefit, which was now publicly advertised, in order to remove every vestige that might remain to the prejudice of that injured young lady's character.

The Honourable Mr. Neville still continued at the Castle with Lord Delaport, his own house at Neville Grove undergoing considerable repairs, and an additional wing and arcades were to be added, and these would take such time, as would render it unadvisable, if not *dangerous*, for so *delicate* a young gentleman to become an inmate, before the ensuing spring; therefore his birth-day was kept at the Castle, and all the fashion of the neighbourhood invited; all the fashion, in course, went to pay their congratulation, we cannot say *respects*, nor *regards*, for he had not one trait in his composition to secure the respect or esteem of the meanest individual; even the roast ox and barrels of ale which were given to the tenantry, he thought wholly unnecessary, till his lordship insisted on the indispensable propriety of the measure; but he was a boundless prodigal in every expence which caprice or vanity dictated. His liveries were splendid: purple, yellow, with rich silver lace, four beautiful greys with long tails drew his new and superb *vis-à-vis*, the body of which was *purple*, highly ornamented with silver, and emblazoned with the family arms, and lined with yellow morocco; the *carriage yellow*, picked out

with purple and silver. His curricule was equally splendid and unique : not “ the *celebrated Amateur of Fashion*,” could render himself more completely ridiculous, while he paraded through the streets and the vicinity, the *gape*, the *stare* of every wondering haw-buck, and the contempt of every rational and intelligent being.

This young and inexperienced pigeon, just escaped from the dove-cot, was too well feathered, to avoid being plucked by the noble and honourable rooks, with whom he had now the felicity to associate ; among the foremost, was Lord Henry Augustus Whitaker, of the hussars. This noble officer was a veteran student, and thorough proficient in *Hoyle's Arithmetic*, well versed in the science of calculation, and deeply read in the *Doctrines of Chance* ; this lord, well known at the clubs of *St. James's Street*, and also at the *Thatched House Tavern*, well considering the honourable little gentleman's propensities, and his predilection for every delicacy in season, now frequently invited him to his table ; he had already taken the dimension of his intellects, which were a mere *superficies* coated with vanity, and no *depth* nor *solidity* beneath ; and rightly judging, that a *calf's*

head is always best when *hot*, he took care to ply the Champagne briskly, whenever Neville made his appearance.

In one of those hours of festivity, when the *choice spirits* and military *blades* of fashion were assembled together, and the honourable little gentleman sufficiently elevated and conspicuously ridiculous, the waiter of the tavern where they had met, entered, and delivered the play-bills for the evening. The piece,—*The Wonder*,—and *Violante* by Miss Irwin : this was the week previous to her benefit.

“That’s a charming girl,” cried Lord Henry. “What would I not give to be in her good graces!”

“Neville let the lucky chance slip through his fingers, when she was at the Castle,” cried Lord Carrick. “Would *I* had had the same opportunity!”

“Why, what a blockhead!” exclaimed Sir Thomas Turton : “Go, go, I have no opinion of your gallantry, Neville, with such a fortune and figure as *yours*, to be foiled by an *actress*. I’m ashamed of you.”

“I was *then* under age, and the eyes of the Earl, my guardian, and the Countess and

the whole family were upon me. I never got her alone, but once, and then——”

“What then?” cried Lord Henry; “come, let’s hear; out with it.”

“Why, by all that’s perverse and provoking, the little prude broke from me, and gave me such a look as almost annihilated me!”

“She is a most excellent actress, and played *that part admirably*,” said Captain Hawkins. “And so you nobly gave up the suite?”

“Oh, no! but she *cut* me,” cried Neville, “and has solemnly renounced me before my guardian; there was the deuce to pay about it, that’s poz. I believe the fool’s vanity led her to suppose I was *honourably* attached, but I have not lost my senses yet.”

“I am glad to hear you say so, but that remains to be proved,” said Lord Henry.

“So I will,” exclaimed Neville, filling a bumper; “here she goes, a bumper round, my lord, to Miss Irwin.”

“With all my heart,” returned his lordship, “what’s her Christian name?”

“*Mary, Mary Irwin*,” replied Neville, “pretty! isn’t it?”

“ Oh ! vastly,” exclaimed Lord Henry, “ rot her surname, ’tis too formal to be registered in love’s calendar ; here’s Maria !” and Maria was echoed round.

“ Now I’m at years of *discretion*, my lord,” said our young honourable, “ I’ll have her, if it cost me half my fortune.”

“ Bravo ! bravo ! nobly resolved, my boy ; she cannot refuse the *discreet* offer of so *discreet* a youth. Your fortune and person must be irresistible, Neville,” cried Hawkins, slapping him on the shoulder.

“ I wrote Charles Bruton word, I had her in my eye, and swore to gain her, cost what it would. I am now my own master, and can offer what terms I please.”

“ Certainly, a *carte-blanche* by all means ; you are bound in *honour* to keep your oath.”

“ The devil is in it if she can hold out against me,” said the conceited fop.

“ Impossible,” cried Lord Carrick.

“ Yet I have my doubts,” cried Lord Henry. “ I’ll bet you a trifle she don’t accept any terms that *you* can offer.”

“ Done,” cried Neville. “ I’ll lay you a cool hundred she does.”

“ Done, for a thousand she don’t,” cried Lord Henry.

“ A *thousand* ! no, that’s too *much*.”

“ Nay then,” replied his lordship, “ you’ll never win her, Neville, if *money* is of such consideration with you. You must venture deep for such a prize ! I should not mind risking five thousand pounds for the very chance you lost, poor as I am compared to you.”

“ I don’t value money, my lord, when I take it in my head ; but she has *affronted* me, and I shall treat her with the neglect she merits.”

“ Nay, this is a subterfuge to cover your want of spirit,” cried Sir Thomas Turton ; “ you should *punish* her, and the only way is, by persisting in your addresses.”

“ I don’t think *my* addresses could punish any woman, Sir Thomas.”

“ There is the young Marquis of Dortlington, son of the Duke of Raby, who is coming down here on *purpose* to snap her up. She expects to be a *Duchess*,” said Lord Carrick.

“ Ay, that’s it ; she think to catch a *peer*, and turn the house of lords into a *theatre*, but I would *mortify* her, if I were Neville,”

cried Lord Henry. "I'd *punish* her, by making her a *commoner's* mistress ; but he has not the heart to venture. I'll lay a *thousand* he cannot even get to *speak* with her, much less will she listen to any terms he can offer."

"I'll go your halves in another thousand," said Lord Brudenell, who had hitherto been silent.

"I should like to punish *you*, my lord," cried Neville, "you are so confoundedly *obstinate*. Done then, my lords, for *two thousand*, that I not only *speak* with her, but that she *accepts* my proposals."

"*Done for two thousand*," cried Lord Henry ; and "*done for another two thousand*," cried Lord Brudenell.

"*DONE, DONE, 'tis a bet*. I'll offer her five thousand pounds down, and a thousand a year *settlement*," cried Neville, "and the devil must bewitch her, if she can resist that."

"She must be more than mortal," cried Lord Carrick, "to withstand such a *youth*, and such an offer. You'll certainly lose, my lords."

"I think so too," said Lord Henry, "so I beg to decline."

"No, no, *no shying off*," exclaimed the honourable beau, quite elated ; "I *insist* it is

a bet, I have four thousand pounds at stake, and I'll *carry* her, in spite of the Marquis, and all of you."

"You have certainly, Neville, taken an effectual way to *punish* her, I must confess, and somewhat new; but notwithstanding the chances are against us, 'tis a bet," said Lord Brudenell.

"Oh! *decidedly, decidedly,*" exclaimed all present. Lord Henry Augustus Whitaker then touched the bell, and the waiter appeared.

"Run next door," said his lordship, "for old Keene, the attorney. We'll have all matters in *black* and *white*, legally drawn up." The waiter returned, and old Mr. Keene was introduced. The business was explained to him, and being an experienced and expeditious hand, he soon stamped their agreement with the forms of law, and the deeds of settlement now only waited the lady's acceptance, to be properly engrossed and registered.

"Now, my lords," cried Keene, "every thing is legally arranged. I have only left room to specify at what period of time these respective notes of hand become *due*, so as in case of forfeiture, they may be then enforced, for as the matter stands, the lady

may be very prudish and shy, and may make it *six* months before she either accepts or rejects the conditions ; not that I say it will be so : such an advantageous offer requires no consideration, and must banish her scruples at once ; therefore, I recommend the earliest opportunity to put it to the test. What shall I say ? We must specify some limited time, what think you of twenty-one days ?”

“ Oh ! that’s an *age* to an ardent and expecting mind. Consider, Mr. Keene,” said Lord Carrick, “ you were once young yourself, have pity on the feelings of my honourable little friend here. The Marquis of Dordlington will be down to-morrow evening, and then *good bye* to Neville’s splendid offer, a *ducal coronet* is the *rival*. Give her no more than three days for acceptance or rejection, and even that is too long for such an offer.” This was agreed to, and the attorney departed.

“ Come, Neville, my boy !” cried Sir Thomas, “ here’s success to you, though you little deserve it. She ought to have been yours long since. Let’s adjourn now to the theatre. Envelope your deed of settlement, leave it at her lodgings, and demand an an-

swer to be sent *here* in three days ; my life on't she thinks no more of her *benefit*. She is *yours* in less than a week."

The little honourable beau, being now thoroughly elated with wine, and the thoughts of winning four thousand pounds with the eclat that would accrue, for his vanity now made sure of her, sat down to do as recommended, and having sealed it, *up* he started.

"Where in such a hurry?" cried Captain Hawkins.

"To drop it at her lodgings," returned he, "and then to speak with her behind the scenes, *d—— me*."

"You'll not gain admittance," cried Sir Thomas, "you tried that *before*."

"I'll now try it *behind*; behind the scenes I say, a *golden* ticket—I—I warrant, will admit me."

"Have with you," said Hawkins, "take my arm, and *steady, boy, steady!*"

"We'll follow you," cried the rest.

"I'm almost beginning to quake for my two thousand pounds," said Lord Henry.

"So should I," replied Lord Brudenell, "but that I know the girl is a scrupulous fool; and having once promised Lord Dela-

fort, she would think it sacrilege to break it ; were any other man to make but half the offer, I would not venture a shilling."

"I sincerely hope the girl may be *wise*, and accept the terms. She will soon be rid of him, for he has no *mind*, no *head*, no *stability*. Another new face will catch him in a month ; but come, let us follow," said Sir Charles, "or he may get into some scrape ; he is rather troublesome when elevated."

"Just sufficiently so for our purpose," answered Lord Henry of the hussars ; "but *Allons !*" And this noble and honourable party quitted the tavern for the theatre.

They entered the boxes at the close of the last scene of the play. In a little time they heard a confused noise and bustle behind the scenes ; at length they distinguished the words, "Demme, Sir, do you know whom you speak to ? I tell you I *will* speak with her. I shall lose four thousand pounds if I don't. I'll give you a hundred guineas only for five minutes converse with her ; take my offer, fellow, don't you know who I am ?

"Oh ho !" whispered Lord Carrick to Lord Henry, "Neville is at work already." "So much the better," replied the other,

the more *disturbance* he makes, the less likely to succeed ; consequently, the more in Brudenell's favour and mine."

Now the fact was, Mr. Neville posted with his friend, Captain Hawkins, to our Heroine's lodgings, and delivered the important packet that was to decide his fate, and the wager of four thousand pounds. From thence they hurried to the playhouse. The young coxcomb now, eager to carry his point, proposed going behind the scenes, and if opposed, to *force* his way ; but the Captain objected to violence, as subversive of his views. On this, they agreed to bribe the porter, and gain admission behind.

When they arrived at the *stage-door*, the porter snarled terribly, and barked out a direct refusal ; but the little gentleman held a sop between his fingers wrapt up in a bank note to the amount of two pounds, which this stern janitor no sooner beheld, than he laid hold of it with one of his paws, and with the other opened the spiked half-door, and admitted them, " since you want Mr. P——, gemmen, he's in his own room."

The two friends now blundered their way behind the scenes, and had more than once

like to have fallen down the traps, had not the carpenters lent their assistance, which they readily granted at the sight of a handful of silver the honourable intruder thought proper to throw amongst them.

As they advanced, several of the performers passed them, with, "Gentlemen, you can't stay here; this is not the way to the boxes."

Up came Sharpe, the Prompter, "Whom do you want, gentlemen? Mr. P——? would you speak with the Manager?" "No, fellow," cried Neville; "none of your male wretches for me. I want Miss Irwin, the divine goddess of my adoration! I must see her, 'pon honour."

"'Pon honour," cried Sharpe, "you can't, she is in her own room, the other side of the house. So let me persuade *you*, Sir, to retire with your friend," addressing himself to the Captain.

"Come, Neville, let's retire," said his friend, "'tis in vain; you'll only get insulted: if you persist, I'll leave you to the consequence."

"What is all this?" cried the Manager, coming forward with his spectacles on.

“ Ha ! old *Barnacles* ! ” cried Neville, “ how goes it, old boy ? ”

“ What’s your business ? Who is it you want, Sir ? Be brief, my time is precious ; how came he here, Sharpe ? ”

“ The gentleman wants to play “ *Beau Trippit*,” in the farce to-night,” said Sharpe the Prompter ; “ he is dressed for the part already, Sir, you see.”

“ Thou art a “ *Lying Valet*,” Mr. Sharpe, to tell thy master such a falsehood. I *must* see Miss Irwin, I tell you, old gentleman, *demme*.”

“ And I tell you, young gentleman, you cannot. “ *She is ill at ease, and will admit no visitors*,” so “ *take thy face hence*,” sweet Sir.”

“ Trip it lightly while you may,”

“ Back from whence you came, and don’t provoke me to be rude in my own house.”

“ *Your* house, fellow, ’tis *my* house, *every* body’s house. The theatre is a *public house*, — me ! And I am one of your best customers, Mr. Landlord ; what say you to that, old Boniface ? ”

“ Sir, good Captain,” returned P——, quite in a fidget, “ pray take your friend

from behind. None but the performers, or those concerned in the business, are ever admitted; it is against all *established rule*: pray do, Sir, before I lose patience, and am compelled to what I wish to avoid."

"*The governor begins to bristle,*" whispered Sharpe to one of the actors.

"Come away, Neville," said the Captain.

"I shan't, and that's one word for all."

"Then since you won't be advised, good night," and Captain Hawkins bowed to Mr. P——, and left the scenes.

"Now, Sir, your road's before you, follow your friend."

"Hark you, old Hunks, you love money dearly, that's *no secret*. I'll give you a hundred pounds, only let me speak five minutes to Miss Irwin: 'tis of the utmost importance; I shall lose four thousand pounds if you don't."

"Not for all you are possessed of. What the plague, would you bribe me to such an act? Quit my theatre, Sir, instantly."

"*Bribe you? why not? your betters are bribed every day, nobles and commoners, and what are you, a paltry Manager! Ah, here comes my charmer! no, 'tis not my angel,*" cried the little fop, as he turned round, en-

deavouring to catch the hand of Miss Thompson as she run up stairs, "I'll after you, —— me," and he made an attempt to follow her.

"And —— me if you *shall*," exclaimed P—— in a rage; "you are some rude puppy in disguise, and are no gentleman, I am confident. So '*abscond*,' '*quit the presence*:' walk out, or I shall order you to be carried out, and toss'd in the carpet."

"*Toss'd, toss'd!* you old scoundrel; do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"Not I, who are you? speak, '*Whey-face*,' speak, '*thou cream-faced loon!*'"

"I am the *Honourable William Neville*."

"On my soul a *lie*, a *wicked lie*! no honourable gentleman could act so *dishonourable* a part; you are his *valet de cham*: I suppose you have got drunk, and dressed yourself in his clothes, and have come here to kick up a row; but you shall pay dear for your frolic, sirrah; I'll write to your master in the morning, to *discharge you*."

"Order a pair of wax candles to light me out of your abominable premises: they smell of oil worse than a Greenland ship; and do hear, fellow, and send one of your men to the head tavern, for my chariot."

“*Chariot!*” cried P——, “a *cart*, a *wheelbarrow!* Here, carpenters! away with him.”

The scene-shifters obeyed the order of their master, seized the little beau, in spite of his puny resistance, and bore him triumphantly away, like Alexander supported by his soldiers; while the performers laughed, clapped, and cried *bravo!* The lamp-lighters were not idle, but plentifully bedawbed his elegant suit with the rancid oil, while an unlucky boy blew some lighted resin among his curls, which were set on fire, and not readily extinguished till half consumed; they then called a coach, and put him into it, which conveyed him in this forlorn condition back to the tavern, where he was immediately put to bed.

His noble friends soon after arrived, and bemoaned with the most hypocritical concern, his unparalleled distress, and the irreparable loss his head had sustained. One recommended a *flaxen* jazy, another a *black scratch*; but all advised him to consult Jessamy in Bond-street, on that important subject, while they emptied several bottles of lavender-water over him, he continually exclaiming, “*poisoned* to a certainty, with

the oil, and the filthy breath of the scene-shifters, the most villainous and diabolical compound of *cheese, onions, fumes of tobacco, fat, ale, and gin*, that ever assaulted the olfactory nerves of an unfortunate gentleman."

During this altercation below, Mary, totally unconscious of what was passing there, was quietly folding up her stage dress and ornaments, and placing them in her trunk, when Miss Thompson entered their dressing-room, laughing aloud, and repeating the following lines :

" A fool ! a fool ! I met a fool i'th' forest.
A motley fool ! a miserable varlet !
As I do live by food, I met a fool !"

As soon as she had recovered her fit of laughter, she repeated what she had overheard, as she listened on the top of the stairs, and related the whole scene that passed between the Manager and Mr. Neville. " He is evidently inebriated," cried she, " or would never so far forget himself ; but it was the most farcical scene you can conceive, my dear !"

" I can see nothing so laughable in it," cried Mary, gravely. " To me it is a serious

concern ; every time that fool is intoxicated, I am to be made the subject of his impertinences ; what must the Manager think of me ?”

“ Think, child, what every one must think,” returned her lively friend. “ If Heaven has given him a *paper-skull*, made of *fool's-cap*, you are not obliged to find him *brains* ; let his friends answer for it ; he'll be sober in the morning, and be ashamed of his conduct ; at any rate he will not trouble the theatre with his presence in haste, from the rough treatment he has received : he was borne off in triumph on the shoulders of the carpenters.”

“ No, sure !” cried Mary, astonished.

“ Fact,” replied Miss Thompson, “ absolute, incontrovertible fact. I stole a peep at the whole transaction ; he was too pretty to walk, and so he was obligingly carried. I am only afraid those fellows' rough hands may have broken some of his china limbs.”

“ Nay, I hope not,” cried our Heroine.

“ Serve him right, if they had ; he richly deserved the treatment he experienced ; he was intolerably impertinent and troublesome ; he'll not annoy us with his visits in

haste ; he was almost in convulsions with struggling ; besmeared over with oil by the lamp-lighters, and suffocated with their strong breath, which is really offensive when they and the carpenters drink, and when is it otherwise ? He'll be confined for a month, and we may expect bulletins reported every day of his state of health."

The performance now ended, and as Mary and her friend descended, they were met by Mr. P——. " I'll see you home *myself*, Miss Irwin : but it is very strange that my theatre must be made a scene of such confusion upon your account ; before *you* came, we had no such doings, no rumpuses, no duellings : 'tis all very *unbecoming*, I must say."

" I am truly unfortunate to be the innocent cause," cried Mary ; " most sincerely sorry."

" Truly so am I," returned the Manager, gravely, and they walked on in silence to her lodgings, when he bade her a good night, and left the friends together.

" I see," said Mary, " my stay in this company cannot be of long duration." As they entered her sitting-room, the packet on the table struck Mary's eyes. She opened

it, and no sooner cast her eyes over the contents, than she let it fall, and burst into an agony of tears. “Gracious Heaven!” she exclaimed, “how am I sunk! what have I done, to be the sport of a drunken idiot, to have my name and reputation bandied about in taverns, among a set of insolent and arrogant beings! Oh! I am past jesting with!”

“It is not worth your notice. Return it, as it is, from whence it came, to the *tavern*; the whole is a drunken frolic, nothing more.”

“It may be *sport* to them, but it is *death to me*,” answered Mary: “stay with me to-night, and advise me.” Miss Thompson sent to apprise her mother, and remained with her friend all the night.

CHAPTER XV.

THE cheerful disposition of this friendly girl was a great alleviation to the melancholy which frequently invaded the repose of our Heroine. In her she might place confidence ; there was a sincerity, and a serious candour about her, though seemingly cloaked under a volatile and sportive temper. She possessed strong animal spirits, and perfect good humour ; yet, she had shewed discernment ; she was warm in her attachments, and steady, yet she could be severe upon occasions, though not implacable. She detested deliberate malice, and insincerity was her abhorrence. Her education had not been highly cultivated, but her understanding was good, and her judgment correct ; and she had considerable experience, being bred to the profession from child.

Removed far from her earliest friends, the society of so amiable, lively, yet rational a companion, was a peculiar and felicitous

circumstance, situated as poor Mary was, and left to herself before the age of nineteen ; engaged in an arduous and new pursuit, harassed and persecuted by the unwarrantable addresses of one sex, and the marked object of envy and detraction in the other. She now freely consulted Miss Thompson in every material transaction, and had the satisfaction to find, that her opinion and advice were not regulated by a complaisant acquiescence, but dictated by sound reason, and consonant with her own feelings and rectitude of principle.

Miss Thompson read over and over again this most liberal and precious offer from young Neville—it afforded her considerable merriment. “ From the signatures of the witnesses, it proves to me,” said this sensible girl, “ that this noble party of his pretended friends, have deliberately planned this scheme to punish his vanity, and speculate on his folly and presumption. The terms are so preposterous and extravagant, they could never suppose any woman in her senses would accept them ; and did you read this scrawl in the envelope ?”

“ No,” said Mary, “ what is it ?”—“ Of

a piece with the rest," cried her friend, "thus it is."

" My Angelic Creature,

" Being my own master, having arrived at years of discretion, and no longer under the beck and frown of old *Stately*, my Guardian, I enclose an offer, which the adoration of your charms could alone dictate. The four thousand pounds which I shall win if you accept the terms, shall be *your's*, to which I shall add another thousand, making five thousand pounds down. Three days am I only allowed, and I flatter myself you cannot take three hours, before you make yourself and me the happiest of mortals. *I* shall be the envy of the *men*, and *you* the *envy* of all your sex, when they behold us riding *vis-à-vis* in my elegant new carriage. Keep me not under the tortures of suspense, but smile benignantly on him, who is

" Thine eternally,

" WILLIAM NEVILLE."

" *King's Arms Tavern.*"

" There, my dear girl, can you resist that? a heart of *adamant* must melt before the

blaze of such ardent passion. Come, sign it, sign it."

"Oh, certainly," cried Mary, "hand it to me." She then took a large sheet of *fool's-cap*, and enclosing the deed and envelope therein, directed the blank cover, "The Honourable William Neville, King's Arms Tavern."

She rang her bell, and desired the maid to leave it with the head waiter, for the gentleman. "This is the only notice I can take of it," added she. "The loss of such a sum, and the reception he has met with at the theatre, may free me from his importunities in future, though I feel myself much hurt and humbled at being the object of public animadversion, and must be thought of dubious character, for my name to sanction such gross proceedings among a set of dissolute and dissipated men at a tavern. It is really beyond a joke."

"You take it in too serious a light," replied Miss Thompson. "Whether it was deliberately done to humble young Neville, or the mere ebullition of an intemperate moment, it is evident no insult or affront was intended towards you, though your sensibility may construe it in that sense. I think

the gentlemen paid a high, though just compliment to your understanding and principles, to venture such a sum on a stranger, of whose rectitude and innate sentiments they could not be certain. I am, therefore, of opinion, the whole transaction was the whim of a convivial hour, concluded over a bottle, and ratified in the true spirit of gambling; and that you were a no greater object of their consideration, than a favourite *race-horse* might be on a similar occasion."

While we shall leave Mary and her friend on their way to the box-office, to look over her plan, and see what places were engaged, that she might form a probable estimate of the respectability of her ensuing benefit, we shall just step into the King's Arms Tavern, and enquire after the little Honourable Gentleman.

It was nearly twelve in the day, when he thought proper to rise. His servant had been dispatched to the Castle for a change of clothes, &c. He now discovered he had received a scratch from some nail in the scenes, which disfigured his cheek, and was magnified by his fears into a severe wound. A surgeon was sent for immediately, who no sooner beheld the gentleman, than, guessing

whom he had to deal with, felt his pulse, and shook his head, to the evident dismay of the intimidated patient ; the surgeon then asked him how his appetite was ?

“ Quite gone, Doctor,” cried Neville, in a desponding tone. “ I have been poisoned to a certainty.” “ *Poisoned !*” returned the surgeon. “ I hope not, though you have every symptom of it ; a green and yellow countenance, and black under the eyes. I hope no love-affair. Bless me, you seem to be swelling already. A violent *nausea*, no doubt, and *heat* in the stomach ?”

“ Oh ! dreadful !” exclaimed the beau, “ and such sickness, and giddiness !” Now it is certain, Neville’s constitution always suffered next day from an over-night’s debauch.

“ We must proceed cautiously,” said the surgeon. “ In the first place you must take a strong *emetic*, then a *cathartic* ; next a *diuretic*, and then a *sudorific*. A blister on the pit of the stomach must be applied, to draw off the peccant and redundant humour, which causes the swelling of the chest ; and, pardon me, you must leave your *fashionable stays* for a time ; or a mortification of the intestines must inevitably ensue.”

“ Oh, Doctor, I can never appear in public without them !”

“ Make yourself easy, my dear Sir, you’ll not be able to appear in public this month to come, at least. I can’t suffer you out of my hands till then : your case is very peculiar. That *cut*, and *bruise* on your cheek, has an angry and *inflamed* look ; done by a *rusty, poisonous* nail, it seems. We must prevent a *gangrene*, if possible, by an *excision* of the part.”

“ Oh ! mercy ! Doctor !” cried the terrified fop : “ sure you are not serious ?”

“ As *fate*,” returned the surgeon. “ We must suppurate the wound, to extract the poison of the rust, in the first place, and then we will proceed *secundum artem*. But the internal poison you have swallowed, claims our chief attention. Pray is it *laudanum*, or *arsenic* you have unhappily taken ?”

“ Neither, Doctor, neither. I have been suffocated and poisoned by the fumes of *tobacco, rotten cheese, onions, strong beer, train-oil*, and *gin*, which issued from the filthy jaws and lungs of greasy lamp-lighters, and drunken carpenters.”

“ Poisoned by *infection* !” cried the Doctor. “ I thought so—by far the most diffi-

cult of cure, as it insinuates itself through all the minuter vessels ; affects the nervous fluid ; creeps insidiously through the system, and corrupts the whole mass of blood. We must proceed to *phlebotomy* immediately." Saying this, he pulled out his lancets and bandage, and was proceeding to tie up the arm, when the whole party of the *bon-vivant* friends entered the chamber.

" Joy, joy ! my boy !" cried Sir Thomas Turton. " She is your's. The kind creature would not keep you in suspense a day. Hey day ! under the doctor's hands !"

" I am *dying*," cried Neville, dolefully.

" Not for *love*, I hope," said Lord Carrick. " ' *Throw physic to the dogs.*' Here's your cure. The waiter had just received it. Now for it ; break the seal, and out she'll spring into your arms, I warrant."

Neville flung down the chair, and nearly pushed the Doctor on his back, as he rushed forward to seize the *packet*, which he tremblingly opened ; and seeing it returned just as it went, cried out, "*Demnation ! cut again, — me.* Four thousand pounds dead and gone to a certainty ! Four thousand devils pursue her !" And he now

danced about the room with rage and disappointment.

“ I think,” said the surgeon, “ a little blood from the gentleman is absolutely necessary.”

“ Demn your blood, Sir, no more from me. I am bled sufficiently ; so begone : I never desire to see you more ; your face is an *emetic*, and the thoughts of your *diuretics* and *sudorifics*, have thrown me into a perspiration already.”

“ An evident case of insanity,” cried the surgeon, as he left the room ; “ the next visit, I’ll bring a straight-waistcoat.”

“ So, Neville,” cried Hawkins, “ your expected prize is a *blank* ;” and he took up the cover, and its contents, which the little coxcomb had let fall on the ground. “ Had you not made yourself so very ridiculous behind the scenes, you would have had a fine girl in your arms, and four thousand pounds in your pocket ; but you would not be advised. What girl of common prudence would have listened to terms from a man, who publicly exposed himself and her to the ridicule of a rude rabble behind the scenes ? When next you address a lady, let it be in *private* : con-

duct your affairs *secretly*, if you ever hope to succeed. However, *bought* experience is best."

"Bought!" exclaimed Neville, "bought with a vengeance! However, hand me that deed, it shall no longer rise in judgment against me: *thus* I tear it, and *thus* I tear her from my thoughts. Let us cancel the notes, and I'll give you each a check on my banker for their amount."

This was immediately complied with.

"So, you give up the pursuit," cried Sir Thomas, "and leave the field to the Marquis?"

"I do," cried the discomfited coxcomb. "I don't think her worth contending for. I don't think the whole sex worth a thought. I think only of the injury I have sustained, my face in this frightful condition, and four of my curls irreparably destroyed! Is it in nature I can forgive her? Am I not poisoned to death? It will cost me fifty guineas in genuine *Otto of Roses*, before I can rid myself of the horrid effluvia. Ugh! I shudder at the recollection! and will set off directly for the Castle, where I'll hide myself and my misfortunes, till my health is thoroughly re-established; and so your servant." And away the honour-

able little gentleman set out in his equipage, to perform his penitential promise, while his companions enjoyed a hearty laugh, and another convivial meeting, at his sole *expence*.

Mary found the box-plan but very thinly scattered, for very few places were taken, while every box for Mrs. Crawley's night was filled, and not a place to be had. She was now informed that old Lady Ridout was to have a very grand route on her night, and that all the people of fashion for miles round were invited. This was no pleasing piece of intelligence: she began to tremble for her benefit, for, if it failed, she must be involved in pecuniary embarrassment, for the first time in her life; a situation, among strangers, peculiarly distressing. On the day previous, a few ladies called, paid for a few tickets, but expressed their concern, that they were obliged to attend Lady Ridout's route, and likewise drop in to a concert and a ball, that was given on the same evening. They said, the night was unfortunate for our Heroine, but observed, that if the *ladies* were otherwise engaged, the *gentlemen* doubtless would support Miss Irwin's night; and with that wished her good day.

Her lodgings, however, were now beset

with gentlemen of fashion, and officers of rank, enquiring for tickets, and requesting to speak with Miss Irwin ; but judging she was indebted for their call more to *curiosity*, than any wish to serve her, Mary had commissioned her landlady, Mrs. Howard, to answer their enquiries, and distribute her tickets. Many of these friendly visitors finding Mary was not to be spoken with, declined taking any, and said they would call again, or pay at the door. Hope now began to fail her, and she went next day to rehearsal totally dispirited.

As soon as she made her appearance in her green-room, Mr. Grimes accosted her,—
“ Good morning, Mem ; how go tickets, Miss Irwin ? Above or below par, eh ? ”

“ I don’t understand you, Sir,” returned Mary, with a grave countenance.

“ Does it rain ? ” asked Grimes.

“ Not as yet,” cried Mr. Staines, but—

‘ The dawn is overcast, the morning lours,
And heavily in clouds brings on the day.’

“ I beg pardon, Miss Irwin ; I did not recollect it is your benefit, but it may be a fine day yet.”

“ Yes, but there is a *route*, and a *ball*, and a *concert* to-night, that is dreadfully against Miss Irwin,” said Mrs. Benson.

“ Well, my night is over, that’s something,” cried Mrs. Crawley.

“ And *well* over, madam,” said Mr. Briskin, “ and that’s more. I wish my night had been half as good ; but I’m afraid I shall be out of pocket.”

“ Oh ! impossible, my dear boy,” cried Grimes ; “ you must have had several pounds over the charges.”

“ And a pretty consolation that !” cried Briskin, “ for the line of business I sustain, a poor recompense indeed !”

“ If you grumbled, with so fine a night, and nothing against you, well may Miss Irwin quake for her’s, when the elements frown, and parties are made against her all over the town,” returned Mrs. Benson.

“ They must certainly injure the night,” cried Miss Thompson ; “ but I can never believe the parties thought about the benefit ; we are *none* of us of such consequence.”

“ *You* may not, nor is your *friend*, it seems,” said Mrs. Crawley ; “ but many a party and concert have been put off, till *my*

night was over. But there are other reasons, which more probably may account for the desertion of her friends."

"I think it very hard," returned Miss Thompson, "that the quarrels and folly of intoxicated men, should be laid to Miss Irwin's charge."

"So I think," answered Mrs. Benson, "but they say——"

"But who says?" cried the Manager; "*that is the question.*"

"Ay, *who* says? if you could bring them to that," replied the old lady, "half the world would be infinitely indebted to you; but there is no tracing things to their origin."

"The origin is nothing," said Miss Thompson.

"That is most probable," returned Mr. Staines; "therefore the propagators of *nothings*, find it necessary to *add* and *add*, lest the airiness of their report should evaporate, before they send it forth, to blow upon the ears of the credulous."

"Yes," said Mr. Sharpe, the Prompter, "and, like the face of a celebrated beauty, it is so disfigured by embellishments and improvements, that, were it not for the princi-

pal features of the scandal, the author himself could not discover the offspring of his own malice."

"But *indiscretion*," said Mrs. Benson, "you must allow, Mr. Sharpe, is always the foundation of such reports."

"More frequently *innocence* and *inexperience*, that gives the rancorous malice of its enemies an opportunity to misrepresent what would otherwise tend to the credit of the vilified party," said the Prompter; "and I think, ladies, that persons in *our* profession should be more lenient to each other. But, truly, I begin in reality to fancy our green-room a dissecting-shop."

"Or rather a *slaughter-house*, or *butcher's shop*, from the *knock-um down arguments*, and *cutting-up* work going on of late, which I shall put a stop to, I am resolved," cried Mr. P——.

"Lord, Sir," exclaimed Mrs. Crawley, "you need not look at us, I'm sure."

"Why not?" returned the Manager. "Whenever I find fault, it is for the general good of the business, and yet I have heard you compliment me, when my back was turned, with the sweet epithet of a sour grumbling old brute."

“Nay, I protest,” cried Mrs. Crawley.

“Nay, don’t protest, I can credit my own ears,” returned the Manager. “For the sake of peace, I am sometimes indeed both *deaf* and *blind*.”

“I vow, Sir, you are the *oddest* man,” returned the tragic queen.

“I know it,” cried P——, “for I speak the truth; but if we speak *ill of ourselves*, how can we expect the *world to speak well of us behind our backs*.”

The rehearsal now commenced, and the pieces were gone through with regularity, to the satisfaction of the Manager, and Miss Thompson and Mary left the theatre.

In the evening, she returned alone, and earlier than usual, in order to collect her spirits for her fresh undertaking, the arduous part of *Imogen*. It was the first time she had to appear in male attire, which the latter part of the play requires, and her spirits were so much depressed at the prospect of the house, that it made such a dress particularly ill-timed, and she would have given any thing she had chosen another play. Her heart died within her, when the piece began, and she beheld how thinly the house was sprinkled; here and there a party clustered together,

had left a dismal gap of empty benches ! the boxes were much in the same way ; and so severely did she feel the absence of the *ladies*, that she actually *wept* on parting with *Posthumus*. Most of the performers, to do them justice, expressed their regret at the thinness of the house, and the Manager fidgeted about, and kept muttering, “ Dear me ! it is really astonishing, and truly unaccountable.”

“ I hope, Sir,” said Mary, “ you do not attribute the absence of my friends to any relaxation of mine in my endeavours to please. I have been uniformly assiduous, you must confess. It is circumstances alone that have caused this seeming desertion.”

“ *Ay*,” cried the Manager, turning sharply round, “ but *what circumstances*, Miss ? ay, *there’s the rub*.”

“ The *route*, the *concert*, and the *ball*, given to-night, Sir. Their engagements were doubtless made before my benefit was announced, therefore I must not complain, if they attend their *first* invitation.”

“ If they were *real* friends, Miss Irwin,” replied Mr. P——, significantly, “ the attraction of cards, mirth, and music, would have had but little weight with them. However,

I'll reconnoitre the force of the succours." With that, the Manager left our Heroine, to take a survey.

Presently Mrs. Benson observed, and addressing Mary, said, "Don't despond, Miss Irwin, the house is beginning to mend; a few parties are come in: some of the upper servants have been given a few tickets by their masters and mistresses, I suppose. But that's of no moment; *they* fill a bench as well as their *bettors*."

Miss Thompson now came skipping after her, and having caught the latter part of her information, seated herself coolly by Mary, and spoke aloud, "Cheer up, my dear; here is your old friend the Countess Delafort, with her lord, the Earl, and Sir George Dashington and Lady Lucy, and a large party of elegants dressed for the concert and ball, just come in, and are seated. *They* have not deserted you, it seems."

"Thank Heaven!" responded Mary, "*now* I *feel* myself supported, and shall be able to go through my part, which I otherwise despaired of doing."

The Manager now returned, rubbing his hands; this was always a good omen. "Well, well, when things are at the worst, they

mend. The theatre begins to fill surprisingly ; there is Lord Brudenel, and Lord Carrick, Lord Henry Augustus of the hussars, with Captain Hawkins, Sir Thomas Turton, Colonel Jameson, Major Martinet, and Captain Emerson, and a whole string of officers, horse and foot, in full dress. There is the *General* of the district too, with his lady and two daughters ; and would you believe it ? miracles will never cease, here is old Lady Stone, and her friend, Mrs. Snowden, for the first time these two years, and such a crowd at the pit and gallery doors, waiting for half price ! but I don't see my *little honourable Alexander the Great*, our mad hero behind the scenes, he is not among them. I fancy he has not recovered his *triumphal exit* yet, heh ! heh ! heh ! Bless me ! don't you hear them pouring in ? Hark ! how the carriages rattle to and fro."

"Miss Irwin has been so absorbed in grief," said Mrs. Benson, "she has heard nothing, but when she gets more used to these disappointments, she will bear them with more fortitude."

"I don't think," replied Miss Thompson, sharply, "that she will *ever* be used to them."

“ Why not, Miss ?”

“ Because her *merit* will soon place her above them.”

“ Whatever depends upon the future,” said the old lady, “ must ever be dubious.”

“ This at least is *certain*, Madam,” returned Mary’s young friend, “ that Miss Irwin can never suffer more injury from the spirit of envious detraction, and the malevolence of ill founded report, than she has hitherto unjustly experienced. The presence of the Earl and Countess and their daughter, Lady Lucy, on this night, is a most fortunate circumstance, and must clear her fame in the eyes of the most censorious.”

Mary did not lose her height in male habiliment; her limbs were finely proportioned, and her dress was elegantly simple and modest; her motion was easy and unconstrained, and she was warmly applauded for her unassuming deportment. Her recitation of Southey’s “ *Maid of the Inn*,” was peculiarly impressive, and rivetted the attention of the Earl and Countess Delafort, and for once called Lady Lucy’s eyes to the scene, while Sir George Dashington and Captain Emerson seemed wholly absorbed in admi-

ration of our Heroine's varied powers, and had eyes and ears for no other object while *she* appeared. The whole night's entertainments were most favourably received.

Next morning she was agreeably surprised with a line from the Countess, lamenting the indifferent appearance of her benefit, and requesting her acceptance of the enclosed ten pounds, for the Earl's and her seat. On receiving the account of her house from Mr. P——, she found, after paying him his charges, and all extra-expences, she would clear about fifteen pounds. The Countess's present, therefore, was highly acceptable, for without it, it was scarcely worth the toil and anxiety she had undergone.

“ How deceptive are the supposed emoluments of actors in general !” cried she. “ The world judges by outward appearance only ; they imagine performers are found in every thing, that their benefit-receipts are clear profits, and that they travel free of expence. This is too common an error, and the actors are envied their supposed and imaginary comforts, while the profession is stigmatized with illiberal censure, and its members accounted an idle, extravagant, and dissipated set of worthless beings. This is the general

and received opinion of all classes, from the highest to the lowest, with a very few exceptions, I now find, though my inexperience led me to think otherwise. Even the lowest mechanic thinks himself superior, and the venders of vegetables, and owners of fruit-stalls are no longer civil, than while our hands are in our pockets.

These suggestions arose in Mary's mind, from what she had seen, and what she had heard others had often experienced. Passing through the market one day, and cheapening some fruit, she was surprised at the price, and asked Miss Thompson if she did not think the woman charged too much; but she soon found she had better been silent, for the virago began, "I suppose you player-volk thinks I earns my living as easy as you does yours; but I works *hard* for *my* bread, so *that's the price*." Mary paid her money, and as she and her friend proceeded, the stall-woman set up a laugh: "There they gang, birds of a feather. If they will be fine ladies, let 'em pay for it; they are no more nor players; here to-day, and gone to-morrow."

"Let us hasten home," cried Mary,

alarmed, "for I find we cannot even *purchase* civility from some people."

Miss Thompson was relating this circumstance a few days after in the green-room, where the company were assembled, "Oh, my dear Miss," cried Mr. Grimes, "that's but a trifle, and what *provincial* performers must expect to encounter from the ignorant and vulgar. What think you, when *London Actors* can't escape their sarcasm? you shall hear."

"Now, Mr. Grimes," cried the Manager, "pray recollect where you are; and don't bring the *barn* into my green-room."

"*Fact*, I assure you," returned the low comedian.

"I know," answered Mr. P——, "all your *stories* are *facts*. You'll excuse me, but you are endowed with the traveller's talent in a very uncommon degree. But proceed."

"About two years since," continued Grimes, "as I was travelling in Passion week, in one of the northern stages, we overtook a post-chaise which had broke down. The passengers were a *gentleman* and *two ladies*. There was no inn nor house within

some miles, as the misfortune happened in crossing a long heath or moor. The party, it seems, were bound to time, and were very anxious to proceed. Our coachman agreed to take them a couple of stages forward, provided his passengers were agreeable; but as the ladies could not ride outside among a parcel of drunken sailors and recruits, without having their fine pelisses spoiled, Mr. Whip prevailed on two of his female insides, and one gentleman, to resign their seats to these strangers for such a distance, which they accordingly did. "I doesn't mind mounting for a few miles to accommodate gentlefolks," cried the fat woman. "Nor I," said a nice rosy-cheeked girl, "I hates to be *perticler* on the road." When we came to the next large town, where a post-chaise could be procured, these grand folks left us, and insisted on treating the inside passengers, all women, with *cakes* and *wine*, particularly the two who had so kindly accommodated them.

"Well, I protest," said the fat lady, "I never seed more helegant genteel volk in my life: it is easy to see what they are; none of your *upstarts*, but so affable and condescending, I warrant they are tip-top gentry."

“ I thought you know’d them,” said Coachy.

“ No, how should we ?” cried the younger.
“ Who are they ?”

“ Mr. B——, of Drury Lane, and Miss S—— and Miss B——, of Covent Garden Theatres. They are going down to act and sing at the grand *rory-tory* at ——.”

“ What !” cried the butcher’s wife, “ and have I resigned my seat to a *stage-player* ?”

“ And have I,” exclaimed the publican’s daughter, “ given up mine to a singer of *ballads* at *Common* Garden ! I thought they took an uncommon sight of airs and impudence upon them, from the first. But ’tis always the way with such *trumpery* !”

“ What say you to that, ladies ?” cried Mr. Grimes. “ How can poor provincialists, like us, hope to escape, when your great *London stars* catch it, and are treated with no more ceremony ?”

“ It is well,” said Mr. Staines, “ that we can wrap ourselves up in our own conceits, and that a necessary vanity and self-opinion keeps us warm, or we should sink under the many mortifications we frequently experience, to which I believe no other profession is equally subjected.” “ But what is the *world*

but a *theatre*?" cried the son of Melpomene.
"Why should *we* despond?"

'This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play.....'

"For, at the very best,

'Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is seen no more.....'

"And I will be bold to say, *our* mock kings and queens, and our heroes, will be as much *reality* a hundred years hence, as the most renowned monarch or general of the present day."

"We are a select community, my boy," cried Briskin, "and the public seem to look upon, and are resolved to keep us as such. We are upon sufferance, while labouring in our vocation, and contribute to their amusement; and if we perchance drop in upon them as *private* individuals, and wish to be considered as such, we are soon reminded of our shop, and are expected to divert the company with a song, or a *jeu d'esprit*, or we are no longer acceptable. In short, we make excellent *devils*, if well seasoned, to relish

their wine, and give them a zest for more. Do you think our professional brothers in town would be invited to so many dinners, were it not for their vocal talents and comic humour, to set the table in a roar? No, no, and they well know it, and they make it answer their ends."

"Our ladies," said the Prompter, "it is true, have not the same opportunities, so are obliged to domesticate, unless perhaps they may be invited to tea and cards and supper, now and then, by their milliner or grocer, as a compliment for their custom, and that I believe is all that either Mrs. Crawley or Mrs. Benson have experienced."

"We are not all so fortunate in grand connections as Miss Irwin," said Mrs. Crawley.

"I fancy," cried Mrs. Benson, "the lady has found such favours more humiliating and troublesome, than *profitable*."

"I am confident," replied Miss Thompson, "that Miss Irwin never sought such; they were voluntary marks of attention, which none of us here present but would be happy to accept."

"My boxes," answered Mrs. Crawley, "were as elegant, and much more fully at-

tended than her's, which shows what dependance there is to be placed on the promises of the great. My views were more *humble*, and I was not disappointed."

"Oh!" cried Mary's friend, "certainly, we all know the humility of Mrs. Crawley."

"Let us be but agreeable among ourselves," said the Manager, "and attend to our business, and the world will repay our exertions, and that is all we can reasonably require or expect. As long as we give no room for censure in our private conduct, we should rest satisfied. The public *will* talk of *public* characters as they please, and we are silly indeed if we let it disturb our peace or tranquillity."

Mary, as soon as she got home, pondered on the remarks that had passed; the last words of Mr. P—— were just and forcible. She no longer wished to be distinguished by the great, as it caused both envy and detraction: she had already suffered sufficiently by their condescension, and determined while in the profession to reconcile herself to that middle and unambitious course, which her present station would alone justify; and she hoped the

next town would produce a more pleasing alteration, a more candid and less fickle audience, and a more social, though less elevated intercourse,—“*a consummation most devoutly to be wished!*”

CHAPTER XVI.

WE have hitherto taken but little notice of Captain Emerson ; we have barely sketched an outline from the incorrect pencil of his sister. We must now proceed to particulars, and draw a stronger likeness. Few men were possessed of a more manly form, or a more soldier-like appearance. His countenance was ruddy, his eyes dark and full. He was unaffectedly polite, and seemed a man of observation and of strong mind. He was an admirer of the sex, it is true ; but his profession claimed his chief attention, as he had a high sense of military glory. He was bred to arms from a boy, for he had entered a marching regiment as a volunteer, much against his father's inclination, who intended him for the church. The consequence was, this tender and conscientious divine left him to carve his own fortune, and took not the least notice of him, till the Gazette announced some gallant exploit of his, when his captain fell, and he succeeded to the command of a battalion of grenadiers, stormed and took the fort by assault, though severely wounded in

the action. Shortly after, he obtained leave of absence to recruit his health for a few months, and to recruit for the regiment, which had suffered materially in several campaigns.

His reverend father now condescended to notice his gallant son, for hitherto his *daughter* had engrossed his sole attention, as far as his devotion to church preferment would permit. The compliments paid to his spirited offspring, the Doctor now took to himself, as the parent of such a son, and his lungs now crowed like chanticleer, when he found the Captain made a Major, first by brevet, and in a few weeks after, recalled to his regiment, being appointed full Major of that distinguished corps.

It was lucky now for Major Emerson, for such we must henceforth call him, that he succeeded by seniority, for as to purchase it was wholly out of the question; and though at the decease of his father, he would most probably succeed to an estate of seven hundred pounds per annum, he could not raise a single shilling on it, without his father's consent, to which proposal the Doctor was as impenetrable as the rock of Gibraltar; and the reverend dignitary having for

many years been blessed with his majesty's countenance set in gold, was so enamoured with the royal likeness, he could not bear to part it out of his sight, even to promote his own flesh and blood, who had so gloriously bled in his sovereign's service.

The Major's health being thoroughly re-established during a six months residence in England, he was preparing to return to the army on the continent; but one thing, one object he had in view, which alone made him regret his short stay, for he was now to embark in the course of three weeks; and that object was—*Mary Irwin!*

He had seen her at his father's twice; he had conversed with her, he had found her sensible, modest, and discreet; he had frequently witnessed her performance in public, and was astonished at the powers of her mind; her just conception of the author, and her varied and impassioned delivery, for her tones reached the most insensible heart, and rivetted the most careless observer. Nor was she in genteel comedy less attractive in *spirit*, *ease*, and *elegance*. He compared her with his sister; but how did that sister suffer by the comparison! In person and in features there was an evident inferiority, though Miss

Emerson was allowed by all judges a very handsome showy brunette ; but in mental endowments, and the qualities of their hearts, he was, from fraternal regard, compelled to close the inquiry, lest disgust should usurp the place of brotherly affection.

“ And can this charming, fascinating girl, possessing the finest sensibility, an innate and retiring modesty, that shrinks from private observation, and awes even the libertine to a respectful distance, whom none but the most depraved in principle, or fools by nature, would venture to insult ; can she, by choice, embrace a profession so repugnant to that delicacy, as to exhibit that enchanting countenance and figure, and her various mental attractions, to the general gaze, merely from the love of transitory fame and public admiration ? Or is it not rather cruel necessity that has forced her to this degrading step, to earn a precarious subsistence by such a derogatory exposure ? Perhaps, my partiality for her has blinded me to her real character. May she not, under all this semblance of virtue, this bashful reserve, be both *artful* and *mercenary* ? May not some former concealed blemish have driven her an alien from her respectable family, who would blush to coun-

tenance her now, though they carefully preserve a silence on the subject?

“ But I wrong the sweet girl. Has she not refused Sir George Dashington’s overtures? True, but he is a married man. Has she not rejected, with silent indignation and contempt young Neville’s splendid offers? True, but what woman of her mind could connect herself with such an idiot, a capricious, vicious fool? I find she has an advocate in my heart; I find she is necessary to my happiness, and I cannot quit the kingdom, till I unbosom my mind to her.”

Much did the Major waver in his mind, upon what terms he should address her. “ If I offer an honourable passion, which I am inclined to do, shall I not irrevocably offend my father and my connections? Shall I not degrade myself by a marriage with an actress? If I obtain her otherwise, I shall indeed gain a triumph over my less fortunate rivals, but I shall involve myself in endless difficulties; for a woman, who, by such unexpected concession in my favour, so far from securing my affections, will sink herself in my esteem. But why should I tempt that virtue which I have every cause to reverence and respect? Has not the presence of the Earl

and Countess, and even Lady Lucy, at her benefit, removed every suspicion, and cleared her spotless name? Has not Sir George confessed to me, that were he now single, a union with such an angel could alone reform him? No, I *will* not, I *cannot* shock her ears with additional insult. I will offer her the only terms I possibly can, in my present situation, a *private* marriage, to be kept a profound secret, till my return, when I shall take her off the stage, and publicly avow the choice I have made."

The Major then, after many fruitless attempts, it being his first essay on such a subject, penned the following letter to our Heroine. His hand trembled while he wrote it, and he could have wielded a sabre at the head of his regiment; "*in th' imminent deadly breach,*" and "*even in the cannon's mouth,*" with far more composure, than he took up the quill to surrender himself a prisoner for life, to the honourable custody of his fair enslaver.

" Madam,

" Feeling myself inadequate to address you in language sufficiently expressive of my feelings, I should despair of claiming

your attention, were I not conscious you possess sensibility in your nature, at least to compassionate the ardent and *honourable* attachment of a man, whom it is more than probable you may neither approve, nor respect.

‘Rude am I in speech,
And little bless’d with the soft phrase of peace ;
For since these arms of mine had seven years pith,
Till now, some nine moons wasted, they have us’d
Their dearest action in the tented field ;
And little of this great world can I boast,
Save what pertains to feats of broils and battles ;
And therefore little shall I grace my cause,
In speaking for myself.’

“ From the moment I first beheld you at my father’s, I felt my heart drawn immediately towards you ; and every time since I have conversed with, or seen you, my reason and judgment have approved the choice my heart selected. I have witnessed your public and private conduct, and the result has been, you have risen still purer and brighter from the trials your patience and your virtues have ungenerously undergone. Can I behold this unmoved ? Can I endure to see you nightly labouring in a profession, so degrading to your birth and education ; and which

necessarily subjects you to the indignities you have already experienced? Can I see this, and not be eager to rescue the object of a *sincere* and *honourable* attachment from a life so very humiliating, and to which a reverse of fortune could have alone compelled you. I cannot be persuaded that your judgment would have made choice of the *stage*, in preference to a less exposed station, had you known the general opinion mankind entertain of it, and the little respect its professors for the most part receive.

“ I cannot offer you, Miss Irwin, a splendid establishment, by holding out fallacious promises, much less would I shock your delicacy with proposals that must render me detestable in *your* eyes, and in my *own*. I am, at present, but a soldier of fortune, and my sword my only support, till my father's decease. Should I survive him, I shall become possessed of seven hundred pounds per annum ; but I wish that may be *far, far* distant ! I have, therefore, nothing to offer but the *hand* and *heart* of a rough, but I hope, honest military man, who will most gratefully repay your condescension, with every affectionate attention in his power ; but as candour shall ever mark my proceed-

ings, I must confess I cannot consent to a public ceremony. The marriage for weighty family reasons must be *privately* solemnized, yet before proper witnesses, bound to secrecy ; for I cannot offend my father wilfully, by an open avowal. Either consent to this, or give me your promise (which will suffice, as I know you will hold it sacred) to remain single till my return, when I shall claim you as mine, and publicly espouse you ?

“ But what have I said ? Why should I presume to exact such a promise, when you can decide my fate at once, by rejecting, or accepting me ? By the latter, should I by chance fall in battle, the provision you would be entitled to as a field-officer’s widow, would be respectable, and secure you from the necessity of seeking subsistence in your present line of life, against which I have a strong antipathy.

“ But whither does my vanity hurry me ? I dare to settle terms, when I might justly tremble, lest my suit meet with the rejection such presumption deserves. I have but one hope, that Miss Irwin’s goodness will not keep me in suspense ; and I trust she will pardon the abrupt sincerity of an epistolary

declaration, which I should not have adopted, had I found a more delicate or eligible mode of conveying my sentiments. Whatever be my lot, even though banished from your thoughts and presence, I must ever remain invariably,

“ Your constant and

“ sincere Admirer,

“ THOMAS EMERSON.”

This declaration, abrupt as it was, and unexpected, was not deemed unworthy of an answer, by our Heroine, from the air of sincerity; with which it seemed worded. There was no fulsome flattery in it, no violent protestations; no desperate resolves in case of refusal; it was “*a round unvarnished tale*,” and demanded to be treated with candour, and respectful attention. She knew very little of Major Emerson; what she had seen of him, made neither for nor against him: she thought him, indeed, the most *amiable* branch or part of his family; but that was a very negative compliment. The unmerited and insulting note from his father was still fresh in her memory, and she could not easily forgive, nor forget it. She was too just, however, to implicate the son in the father’s

precipitate and ungentlemanly conduct. This epistle was an evident proof how their sentiments differed ; nor could she suppose the Major had the slightest knowledge of his sire's intention ; but it was a family she by no means wished to be connected with, had she even entertained a partiality for this officer. The Doctor's *hauteur* ; the servile submission he paid to the reigning opinion of the day ; his complimentary language blended with contempt ; the affectation and disgusting insensibility of his daughter Olivia, a vain and selfish creature, rendered affinity with such characters by no means desirable. Her heart was not interested in this avowal of the Major's sentiments ; and the idea of a *clandestine* union shocked her little less than a baser proposal, as it implicated a something, either in her conduct or profession, that made a public recognition of a *lawful* claim to respect, incompatible with such a husband's notions of *propriety*. In short, it was requiring what a real and truly ardent affection could never stipulate—the sacrifice of the affectionate sensibility of a wife, to the pride of a family, and the opinion of a fastidious and capricious world. The blunt sincerity of the Major, of whose

honourable intentions she was sufficiently satisfied ; and above all, his wish to secure her a previous independence, by making her his wife, in case of accidents, before he returned to the field, filled her gentle bosom with an esteem she never felt before ; and she could not help wishing sincerely, that a *rational* affection like *his*, might be transferred to some worthy woman, capable of appreciating the merit of so honest and brave a man, and willing to make an adequate return.

Filled with these reflections, she sat down and wrote the following answer to the Major's proposals :

“ Sir,

“ Though I confess I am considerably surprised at your addressing me on a subject so very remote from my idea and expectation, the candid manner in which you have stated your honourable intentions towards me, demand an equally candid and explicit declaration on my side, which I entreat you to believe, at once *decisive* and *definitive*. I am truly sensible of the honour you have done me, and am grateful for the distinguished preference paid to my poor deserts ; but as gratitude is all I ever can feel for that prefer-

ence, I should ill repay your honest declaration, did I not with sincerity assure you it is my fixed and unalterable determination never to give my hand where my *heart* is wholly *uninterested*, and can feel no *warmer* a sensation ; and even were my affections engaged, so peculiar, and, perhaps romantic, are my sentiments, that I could never consent to enter into a respectable family by *stealth*, or connect myself in marriage with any man whose choice would reflect disgrace, and make him blush at the avowal.

“ I assure you, Sir, I have no idea at present, neither wish nor inclination to alter my condition ; the profession in which I am perhaps unfortunately engaged, will most probably keep me single for many years ; for as my ideas are not extravagant, nor presumptuous, by seeking an elevated or distinguished alliance, so, neither, could I ever bring myself for worldly considerations, to unite with a man of coarse habits, and of vulgar mind : a reciprocal affection can only form the basis of nuptial felicity, and till my heart and judgment warrant the acceptance, I must decline every overture whatsoever, however flattering and advantageous. I most sincerely hope your affections may be

transferred to some more amiable and deserving woman, whose rank in life may equal or exceed your own; but above all, who can duly appreciate your worth, more than ever can, Sir,

“ Your very grateful

“ and obedient Servant,

“ MARY IRWIN.”

Just as she had concluded this letter, Miss Thompson called upon her. “ I have interrupted you, I am afraid,” cried she; “ if so, don’t let me disturb you; I can drop in another time.”

“ You have arrived very seasonably,” said Mary. “ I have just finished a direct refusal to a very serious offer of marriage, I assure you; and I will give you twenty guesses, ere you discover the person.”

“ It cannot be from the little Alexander the Great?” cried her friend, “ Perhaps he has repented of the insulting proposal he made you, and wishes to make the ‘ *amende honorable* ?’ ”

“ Oh no! I could never expect, great as his folly is, that he would be guilty of such a degrading condescension. Guess again.”

“ Perhaps it is from young Pattypan, the confectioner; he is certainly a *sweet* young

man, and is a great admirer of you, I assure you."

"No," cried Mary, smiling, "I have not had *that* honour as yet."

"Perhaps," said the other, "from some needy ensign, or lieutenant, who thinks you are weak enough to be caught with a bit of scarlet cloth, and an epaulet."

"You are right in one respect ; it is from an officer," said Mary, "but one of rank in the army."

"Can it be from Colonel Jameson, or Lord Henry Augustus of the hussars?"

"From neither," returned our Heroine : "here is the letter, read it, and then you shall peruse my answer ;" and she handed over the Major's proposals for her young friend's inspection.

"Well, what think you of it?"

"I consider it," said Miss Thompson, "as a very *honourable* and *advantageous* offer, and what few girls in our situation, would hesitate to accept. I hope you have not peremptorily rejected him. It requires, I think, due consideration, and to be well weighed first; for, believe me, such offers very seldom occur."

“ Here is my answer ; I foresee you will blame me, but I cannot help it.”

Miss Thompson read over the answer of Mary with particular attention, and returned it with a shake of her head.

“ Well, what is your real opinion ?”

“ I shall not disguise the truth,” answered her young friend ; “ but I think you are unwise, if you send a direct refusal. In the first place, he cannot expect that your delicacy would permit you to close immediately with his offer ; therefore, I would dictate my answer with reserve and caution ; it is an honest, open avowal on his part, and pays no more than a just tribute to your merits. It is, in my opinion, a very advantageous offer, as the wife of a field-officer, in the high road to preferment, and heir, likewise, to seven hundred pounds *per annum*. You have little reason to expect so eligible, if ever, so good a proposal ; and, pardon me, however cogent and conclusive your ideas on this occasion may appear in your own eyes, your objection to the want of affection, and to a private marriage, are both unnecessarily *squeamish* and *romantic*. The gratitude and esteem you must feel for such a

man, would soon be converted into love; and though your union, for family reasons, might, for a short period, be kept secret, it would only be till his return from the continent, as he has declared. Believe me, my dear girl, you stand a much greater chance for happiness, with such a blunt, honest, and rational companion, than from all ideal raptures your fancy may suggest in a more refined and ardent passion; let me beg of you, therefore, to reconsider, and by no means to send such an answer."

"I have considered your reasons and arguments attentively," returned Mary, "which, I confess, bear the stamp of worldly prudence; but I cannot, from such selfish consideration, sacrifice my own feelings, and my ideas of propriety. Give me leave to observe, I know the Major's family; *you* do not; and if I really could bring myself to like the man, I could never forgive myself for being the cause of an irreconcilable breach with his father, which would inevitably ensue on a discovery: as it is, however you and the world may condemn me, I cannot unite myself to a man for whom I feel not the smallest inclination or affection. So this letter must go, even as it is."

“ Well, child,” said Miss Thompson, “ if you will not be advised, you must even follow your own course. I have no right to control you : it will prove to him, you have no *mercenary* views ; and if you are satisfied, he must be so of course ; at all events, his love appears not of that intense nature to hurry him into any act of desperation, and we may expect no tragical catastrophe.”

“ I have no doubt but he will take my refusal,” said Mary, “ as a mark of my resentment at the treatment I have recently experienced from his father ; for though I by no means can suppose he approved of such intimation, he cannot be ignorant of my exclusion from all intercourse with the family. This offer might be made as a bait for my vanity, or my avarice, and without the intention of being duly and legally ratified : at all events, whether he takes offence or not, I shall be rid of his addresses, as he shortly leaves England.”

“ I do not imagine the Major capable of such duplicity,” replied her friend : “ there is an air of candour through his letter, which by no means justifies such an ungenerous suspicion ; but I think his pride may take alarm, and make him repent of the offer he

has made ; you may thereby create an *enemy*, instead of securing an honourable and highly estimable rank in society. You are not vain nor foolish enough to suppose, because some few of the profession have accidentally been elevated to a *noble* station, that your merit and qualifications, however transcendent, will entitle you to a *baronet* ?”

“ What have you ever seen in my conduct, either in word or actions,” returned our Heroine, gravely, “ that could lead you, for a moment, to harbour such a thought of me ? I am not vain, *far far* from it. I am the child of *adversity*, and an arduous struggle shall I find it, to earn a decent competency ; that is the height of my ambitious views. You instance a very few women, who have, by marriage, exalted themselves, and quitted, consequently, our profession ; but were it possible to look into their hearts, they are not probably more happy than when single, or had they united themselves to men more on a level with warrantable expectations. How mortifying must it be to women, highly descended, and of noble birth, for centuries, to yield precedence to an *upstart intruder*, for such she must ever be accounted, merely in deference to her husband’s rank.

All the circumspection she can use ; all her previous accomplishments, which were readily allowed, while confined to her own sphere, vanish before her supposed presumption ; and though tacitly admitted, she can never hope for friendship, or intimacy, among her *present* equals. Her former profession and connexions will be a continual source of scorn and contempt. She likewise is otherwise unfortunate, for she cannot, thus elevated, descend to associate as formerly ; so that, unless her lord be a most uncommon man indeed, and she be possessed of a very superior mind, she can never be happy ; but must be content to domesticate, a mere *recluse*, more circumscribed than those in a far more humble station. Such are the fruits of what I call, *unjustifiable female ambition* ; their situation, in my humble opinion, is by no means enviable."

" Pray," asked Miss Thompson, " do you think so very humbly of yourself, that you would reject a similar offer from a man of the same rank as the Major, and one whom your heart otherwise approved of, merely because he is in a more *honourable* and *superior* line in the list of society ?"

" You ask a question which I am not

prepared to answer : this only I can say, my birth and family connexions might formerly have justified such pretensions ; but the sad reverse of fortune I have endured, and, above all, my present situation, which I feel more and more humiliating, preclude all such thoughts and expectations. I am, therefore, content to redouble my exertions to rise to eminence in my profession, to secure, if possible, a moderate sufficiency ; then, should I meet with a worthy intelligent man, of good education, and liberal principles, on a level, or somewhat superior to myself, I should not hesitate to accept him : but I must be convinced first of his rectitude of conduct ; for we have instances of *some* actresses of the most *amiable* and *irreproachable* conduct, being made unhappy by uniting with men of dissipated character. We cannot be too cautious."

" This is all very fine talk, my dear girl," cried her lovely friend, " and a most prudent, methodical resolve ; but it only proves to me, you are not yet *caught*, your heart is still your own ; and so is mine, thank Heaven ! so we must put off this important business, and leave the discussion, like Doc-

tor *Drowsey's* sermon, to a fitter opportunity."

The friends now prepared for a walk, and on their way, Mary stopped at the post-office, and put in her answer to the Major. How that officer received it, will be best seen by the following reply, which he sent the day after :

"Major Emerson's best respects wait on Miss Irwin : he has received her candid and explicit answer ; he highly applauds her motives, and her delicacy, which have, perhaps, unfortunately for him, more than ever raised her in his estimation. He hopes at his return, he may find her still single, and her heart disengaged, when he may no longer be restricted, but make a public avowal of that pure and disinterested affection, it will ever be his pride to cherish, while there is a possibility of succeeding by honourable endeavours. He has attempted to sketch a miniature-likeness, but he has thrown aside his pencil as incompetent to pourtray it ; nor does he need a *copy*, while the *living image* must ever remain present in his thoughts, as it is indelibly engraven on his heart."

Mary was by no means pleased at receiv-

ing this note, respectful and delicate as the sentiments appeared ; as he seemed still to entertain hopes, which she could by no means bring herself to realize. But an event now occurred, which, for the present, occupied the serious attention of the Major, for it involved both him and his father in disgrace and sore affliction, while it filled the noble inmates of Delafort Castle with consternation, grief, and unavailing misery.

We have already given our readers a portrait of Sir George Dashington. He had married Lady Lucy for her fortune alone. He did not, could not, love his wife ; her temper growing hourly, more jealous, teasing, irritable, and impetuous. Having now obtained full possession of all he wanted, her *property*, he began to treat her with coolness and contempt ; a mode of treatment the most cutting and offensive, possible, to a lady of her high spirit, who, to do her justice, with all her numerous faults, most sincerely loved him, and little deserved, from him, so base a return. Unprincipled, and a libertine in the strictest sense, finding our Heroine deaf to his delusive arts, he returned, and renewed his unwarrantable addresses to the Rev. Dignitary's daughter : how far

he had hitherto succeeded, we shall not presume to say ; as the truly respectable rank of the Divine and his son, and the strict education of Miss Olivia, bred up under a watchful, strict, yet indulgent parent, would make even a suspicion of the kind a libellous profanation. That Sir George was perjured and foresworn, we have little doubt ; for with all her ill-concealed partiality in his favour, we cannot suppose Miss Emerson so lost in principle, as to yield, without a long and close siege, and the most peremptory promise of an honourable alliance.

How must her hopes have been disappointed, when convinced of his perfidy ! We have already seen the effect it had on her at the *ball* ; and she continued ill for some time. For her health's sake, she was removed to a farm-house, to a tenant of the Doctor's, where she continued to reside, till she suddenly disappeared, as did Sir George Dashington, a very few days after !

Words can but ill express the surprise and shock both families experienced, when news was brought that Miss Emerson had eloped from the farm-house, and was seen in a hired chaise and four, in company with a gentleman, driving full speed towards Lon-

don. The Doctor could not, would not believe his child, his darling child, capable of such depravity, such ingratitude. The brother was equally incredulous: could his friend, his *intimate* friend, a married man too! seduce his *sister*! *impossible*! yet, why not? did he not attempt *Miss Irwin*, since his union with the Earl's daughter? does an adept in seduction stand upon *punctilio*? *no*; the *nearer* the connexion, the *closer* the tie; the *firmer* and more *fervent* the *friendship*, the *greater* is the incentive to *violate* those bonds, as it is accounted the very *acme* and *perfection* of gallantry.

An incoherent letter to her brother, which avowed her depravity, and her determination to remain with her seducer, confirmed the dreadful truth.

Fired with indignation, and maddened almost to desperation, at the infamous confession, the Major, most probably, would have instantly sacrificed both her and her paramour to his vengeance; but the birds were flown. He immediately set out on the pursuit, determined to wipe away the stain and injury his father's and his own honour had received from this most treacherous and perfidious friend! For many days

his search was fruitless, till meeting, by the merest accident, the Baronet's black servant in the street, who would have shrunk from his observation, the Major seized the fellow, and with the threat of instant death, drew from him his master's residence, at an obscure village about seven miles from town, where he had taken a small furnished house, and went by the name of Colonel M'Gilvray, of the Honourable East India Company's service. Thither the indignant Major, burning with resentment, and his wounded honour, immediately posted: they met; they fought; and the Baronet was left for dead.

The Major now found it doubly expedient to embark for the continent, and join his regiment; his term of absence was almost expired, and he would not arrive a day too soon. He accordingly set out, having previously arranged his business to that end: he dropped an affectionate and dutiful letter to his father, wherein he confessed his having punished his sister's seducer, but had left her to the fate she merited. He recommended the Divine to endeavour, if possible, to reclaim and to seclude her.

The unfortunate Dignitary, overwhelmed

by this degrading calamity, could no longer appear in public, but retired to a distant county, upon one of his livings, and the Earl of Delafort set a final separation immediately on foot, between his daughter and her husband, whether the Baronet survived or not. All was confusion at the Castle, and the lie of the day circulated with increasing energy, as it laid both the combatants dead on the field, and drowned the deluded victim in a fit of desperation and despair.

In this state were matters, when Mary, with the rest of the performers, proceeded to the next town in the routine of their annual circuit.

From the foregoing occurrence, it is evident, that when the principles are corrupted, no respectability of family or station can preserve from error and disgrace. Had our *Heroine* fallen, it would have caused no surprise, but have been accounted as a thing in course, with the charitable observation of —“ What could you expect from an actress ?” But for the credit of the theatric profession, there are many women, whose circumspect and virtuous conduct in private life, might serve as patterns to their superiors ;

for it is not the profession itself that degrades, but the members of it, whose conduct disgrace their calling : if, however, some think otherwise, how much more to be esteemed are those females, who rise above those temptations supposed incidental to their exposed line of life ? Whose principles have firmly withstood the siege, and have put detraction to the blush ?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next town the company moved to, was a large bustling sea-port. The inhabitants, and, consequently, the audience of a different description, from the politer residents of the place they had left: they were noisy, and good-natured, and for critical judgment, few could be held in competition; and their taste was equally exquisite; roaring, ranting, tragedy; spectres, ghosts and goblins; combat, pageantry, banditti, with assassination, and conflagration, were, in their idea, the very perfection of dramatic composition, and the hero and heroine who could please them, must be uncommonly endowed with strength of lungs and limbs.

As Mr. P——, from a long and previous knowledge of their refined taste, had prepared dishes, highly seasoned, to suit their palates, the whole artillery of scenery, and machinery, with kettle-drums, and trumpets, was set to work, and *John Bull* and *Jack Tar*, with *Poll* and *Sue*, were soon in the height of their element. Genteel come-

dy, and the delicate and minute touches of nature, in pathetic tragedy, were, at best, but water-gruel, without salt or sugar ; and too insipid to be endured. *Our Heroine*, in course, passed unnoticed, unless for her personal attractions, and the elegance of her dresses ; whereas, shouts of applause, and deafening clamours of approbation rung the house, whenever Mrs. Crawley made her appearance, or Mr. Stent, Mr. Strutt, or Mr. Flinger occupied the stage.

Having plenty of leisure time at her disposal, for she seldom performed more than twice a week, she devoted her hours to study, and to write to her friends, Mrs. Forster and Mr. Percy. The transactions of the last six or seven weeks had, with her benefit, hitherto engrossed Mary's attention. She, therefore, called to mind every particular, and communicated them in regular succession. She dwelt partially only on young Neville's absurd proposals to her, and treated them, as they deserved, with ridicule and contempt ; but from respect to Mr. Percy, the offer she had received from Major Emerson, was spoken of by her, with grateful acknowledgment ; but as her reason for rejecting it, was couched in her answer,

she enclosed a transcript of each, when she communicated the afflicting news of Olivia's degenerate conduct. She palliated every possible circumstance, as she well knew Mr. Percy's kind heart would sympathise with the deepest regret and concern, in the heavy misfortune that befel his old college friend.

She candidly confessed to Mrs. Forester, that had she known as much of the life she had embarked in *before* she embraced it, as she did at present, it would have been one of the last she would have chosen. She now allowed that the stage was branded with a *stigma*, however unjust and unmerited, which she feared no length of time, no precautionary conduct, could eradicate or alter : and lamented, that she was doomed for an existence to linger in a profession so *disreputable*, and so inimical to her sensibility. There were so many draw-backs on the profits, that rendered it both precarious and uncomfortable ; the study and application continual, and the pleasures and emoluments casual and unsubstantial: all this, however, should never tempt her to relax in her endeavours, till she emerged, if possible from provincial obscurity, and obtained a situation at either of the winter houses. She conclud-

ed with requesting a continuance of their friendly counsel, without which consolation, she should feel herself truly unhappy ; and begged Mrs. Forester to acquaint her, how her sister Hester, and her Aunt were, &c. &c.

Having sealed and dispatched these letters, in looking over her papers, she found a letter directed to Captain Mildmay, R. N. She now recollected it was the introductory one her friend Mrs. Mildmay had written in her behalf, to her brother ; and this she soon found was the very town where the Captain resided ; for he was as well known as the guard-ship that lay at anchor in the roads.

“ He is a strange character, his sister informs me, very blunt, and perhaps boisterous in his manners, though he possesses a good heart. No matter ; he may easily be more worthy than the reverend Divine, whose pompous condescension was so very distressing, that I have often repented of seeking his countenance. I will, therefore, venture to enclose this letter, and leave it at his house. Whether he will notice it or not, will depend upon the humour he is in, most probably ; but I should ill requite Mrs. Mildmay, for the interest she has taken

in my welfare, did I slight or neglect her wish to serve me."

Accordingly, one fine evening, she dressed herself neatly, and proceeded to the Captain's house, a small, but handsome brick tenement, situated on the verge of the town, which was open to the sea. She could not mistake it, for his name was conspicuous on the brass plate at his door. When she knocked, an old woman appeared, and asked her business; Mary said she had a letter for the Captain. "Lack-a-day, Madam," returned the old servant, "I durstn't disturb measter for the varsal world. The Captain has just stowed in his grog, and he is now snoring louder nor a hog in a high wind, don't you hear him? and the house couldn't hold him, nor *me* neither, if I were to rouse him; he mun e'en wake of hisself." Mary said, "It was no matter, she would leave the letter, and would take another opportunity of waiting on her master."

"Nay, for the matter of that," said the old woman, "you can't have no better opportunity, forsooth, if you only step in here for about a quarter of an hour, for he wakes exactly as the clock strikes five, and calls for his baccy-box, and his pipe; I am

now filling it for him, and making him another rummer of stiff grog, which I brings him in every evening, as soon as I hears him stir ; so if you'll walk in, Miss, and sit down a bit, he will soon be in a good humour to be spoke with ; but he would throw the house out of windows, and me after it, if I was to mislest him, or break his nap."

Mary returned the old house-keeper thanks for her civility, and said, she would gladly accept her offer, as she wanted to enquire after Mrs. Mildmay.

"What ! Madam, and did you know Madam Mildmay, measter's sister ?" and the old woman with a low curtsey, brought her into a small neat back parlour, where she was preparing the Captain's evening's mess and beverage.

"How long did Mrs. Mildmay stay with her brother," asked our Heroine.

"Why," replied the old woman, "she is only gone about a week ago, to pay a short visit to a friend, a few miles distant, and I expect her back in a few days, and then she'll pass a week or two longer, mayhap, before she quits us for good. Ah ! she is a nice lady, and so kind and good tempered, it is a comfort to be in a house with her.

Though the Captain quarrels with her three times in a day, he would knock the Admiral down, if he were to say black was the white of her eye. He is so doating fond of his sister ; and if you know her, you are sure of a hearty welcome from the brother, that I make bold to tell you."

The clock now struck, and presently, a loud *yawn*, and a couple of hearty *sneezes*, pronounced the Captain's nap was at an end. "Yo ho ! there," cried the son of Neptune, "all hands aboard ! haul t'ne grog and pipe along-side, Old Mother *Devildum*, are you dead ? Bear a hand, my jolly old *Bum-boat*, do you hear ?"

"There, there, Miss," cried the old house-keeper ; "there, he has begun ; bless me ! he is in high good humour, by his abusing, and calling me his pet names. I'll take in his grog and baccy first, and after a few whiffs, and a good pull, then for your letter, Miss," and away the old lady hurried.

"Is the grog good and *stiff* ?" asked the Captain.

"Will your honour please to taste ?" answered Martha.

"Come, my old dame, give me *your* opinion," returned her master, filling a glass,

and charging one for himself. Blood and thunder ! it is downright *môlasses* ; you've a devilish sweet tooth of your own, old Fusty-rump ; put in a little more stingo, and some water to't, and then 'twill be drinkable." Old Martha retired, and returned with more rum and water ; the Captain finding it now to his liking, replenished his glass, lighted his pipe, and puffed away.

The old house-keeper now brought in the letter to the Captain, who having wiped his spectacles, began to peruse it. He then read his sister's letter, and presently rung the bell violently.

" Now for it," cried Martha ; " I warrant I shall catch it," and away she waddled to obey the summons.

" Who brought these letters ?" asked her master.

" A young lady, your honour, who now waits in the back parlour."

" How could you have the impudence, you old Saracen's grandam, to stow the young lady abaft, when you ought to have introduced her to the state-cabin at once ? hey ?"

" I was afeard to disturb your honour's nap in your easy chair."

“ You were afraid to disturb the *devil* !” growled the Captain.

“ Very true, measter, for your honour is always in a devil of a humour, if you hasn’t your doze out.”

“ Slack your jaw, and sheer off, you old hulk,” cried her master, “ and send the tight little frigate along-side of me, do you hear ?”

Mary now entered, and curtsyed as she approached the Captain, who immediately dropped his pipe, rose, and made a low bow, and taking her hand, led her to a chair by the fire-side. “ Your name is Miss Irwin ? I have just over-hauled my sister’s log-book, and I shall now take an observation myself. You’ll excuse me, Miss, but ’tis my way.” He then put on his spectacles, and had a stare at his new visitor, who could not help colouring a little, though she was aware of the eccentricity of the man.

The Captain was a broad, well-set figure, somewhat below the middle size ; his head was bald on the crown, and his silver locks were tied behind in a small *queue*. His features were strong and coarse ; he had a large scar on his cheek, and his countenance wore the

marks of many a tough gale, and a variety of climate.

“ I beg pardon, Miss *Ermine*, but I now find my sister correct in her reckoning. When I have seen the trim of the vessel, I can give a pretty shrewd guess how she'll sail. You are but lately launched into the ocean of public life ; I hope the tide has been in your favour since you left your native shore ; no squalls, no unfavourable weather, since you took your departure ? 'Tis a wide sea you've embarked in, and many variable winds you must encounter, and buffet. There are many *false lights* and *signals* will be held out to lure you to rocks and quicksands, so that you will find it difficult to steer clear, unless you have got a good pilot at the helm.”

“ I do not exactly comprehend you, Sir,” said Mary, with a complacent smile.

“ Then in plain English, I hope you are possessed of *prudence* and *discretion*, to guide your inexperience. It would be a thousand pities so sweet and fair a vessel should founder, without an able pilot to conduct her. So, Miss, for want of a better, if you will accept my poor services, you are heartily welcome to them, not only on my sister's

account, but on your *own*. I shall be happy to act as your *sailing-master* ; so you have only to obey instructions, and keep a good look out."

"I shall be ever proud, Sir," returned Mary, "to obey the instructions of so able and experienced a commander."

"Now I like that ; that's frank, and above board, all in my way," cried Captain Mildmay. "I hate your squeamish misses, that are too modest at noon to look a man in the face, and yet would not hesitate to meet him by moon-light. Now, child, as there are many men of war cruising about here, who may turn out *enemies*, and be glad to capture so nice a prize—Od's my life ! I think I may sometimes act as your *convoy*, when you see occasion. I shall keep a strict watch on them, be assured, my lass. They shan't grapple you, while old *Tom Mildmay* has any powder and ball left. But here am I talking to you, who have come all this way, in compliment to a good for nothing old bachelor, without ever asking you to take any refreshment. I shan't require you to take a pipe, nor drink grog, but I insist on your staying for tea, and you shall make it your-

self. I like every thing strong and good." With that the Captain rung the bell, and when the house-keeper came, "Do you hear, my old bumboat, take the keys and open the locker in the small cabin athwart, and haul out the canister of *gunpowder*."

"Lord ha' mercy! Measter! *gunpowder*! why sure ——"

"Whew! you stupid old donkey," cried her master, "gunpowder *tea*; what else; could you suppose? Do you think I wanted to blow the young lady up, you diabolical incendiary?"

"I don't know, marry, for my part, but you often blows me up, aye, and Madam Mildmay, your sister, too, but all in good nature, as I may say, and so——"

"And so, obey orders, and break some refined sugar, and toast two or three muffins, do you mind? or I'll blow you to the devil at once, and set fire to your tail with a lighted match."

"Mercy be good to me! but you will have your humours, if any body cared for 'em." And away the old woman trotted.

"That old harridan is the plague of my life, and yet I put up with her ill tempers,

because I'm used to her, and she helps to keep me alive and in spirits. She is a trusty, faithful servant, that's the truth on't."

"I think, Sir, she seems very good-natured, and has a great regard for you, and Mrs. Mildmay, whom she extols as one of the sweetest tempered ladies she ever beheld. And I am sure, Sir," added Mary, "I have reason to say your sister is one of the best women breathing."

"Why, to be sure, my sister is good-natured, and good tempered, and all that; but there is no quarrelling with her. I do all I can to raise a breeze, but she only laughs at me; that so provokes me, I could kill her at times. So I take my hat, and cool myself with a *sea-breeze*, since I can't enjoy one at home."

The tea-equipage was now brought in; Mary, at the Captain's request, presided, and that gentleman declared he never tasted a more delicious cup, than what was presented from the hand of his fair visitor.

"How long have you been stationed here?" asked the Captain.

"About a fortnight, Sir."

"And why did you not call here, on your arrival? you would have then met my sister. But, you sly puss, you wanted to catch the

old fellow alone ; hey ? But one word for all. The only footing we shall be on, is that of friendship. You shall call me *guardian*, and I'll call you my *ward*. I'll have an eye upon you : you shan't slip your cable unknown to me, depend upon it."

" I am proud, Sir," replied Mary, " of the title you have conferred upon me, and shall submit my actions to your guidance and direction."

" I don't understand your *acting*, for my part," said he ; " but I once acted a very good part at a benefit."

" *You*, Sir !" cried Mary, laughing. " I should have liked to have been present."

" I filled the house, I assure you ; it was a *bumper*, and my name was in large characters in the bills and posters."

" And what *part*, Sir, may I ask, did you perform ? what character ?"

" My *own*, child. I sat in the stage-box along-side the admiral, the whole night."

" Dear Sir, I thought you said you acted a part in the play ?"

" I think I acted the best part ; I filled the house for one of your actors, about two years ago, who had a large family. I bespoke his play. I am commandant of the *sea-*

fencibles here, and brought all my corps, with all the officers and half the crew of the different ships in the road and port. It banged the admiral's night, all to nothing ; and ever since, I have been plagued with solicitations, so that I won't suffer a play-bill inside my doors. Your old fat Manager came bowing and scraping to me last year, and asked my interest for his night. "*No*," answered I, "*I shan't*; you don't *want* it, for your house will be crowded enough, without my assistance. If ever I lend my name again, it shall be for some good purpose, and to serve those I like. I think, Miss *Ermine*, that—"

"*Irwin*, Sir."

"Well, *Irwin* or *Earwig*, 'tis all one. Rot the names, I can never remember 'em. I call my sister Mrs. *Milk* and *Water*, and Mrs. *Capillaire*, she is so sweet, and smooth, and insipid. I think, my little *wardy*, you'll coax me out of my name for your night. Then, if I don't have a *thunderer*, my name's not Tom Mildmay."

Mary pressed his hand as she rose to take her leave, and thanked him for his kind offer, and hoped she would soon have the pleasure of meeting with Mrs. Mildmay.

"Ay, ay," cried the Captain, "I war-

rant I shall have plague enough with you both, you'll never be asunder; but if I don't find you throw a little life and a little contradiction into her, and jump and dance and sing about the house, I'll throw you both out of window, for a pair of tame rabbits, without sauce or salt. If you give me a call the latter end of the week, I dare say, you'll see her."

Captain Mildmay shook his adopted ward heartily by her hand, and bowed very politely as she departed. He even went to the door with her himself, and opened the *hatch-way*, as he called the gate of the railing before the plat, and walked several yards forward on the causeway with her. She at length reminded him he was without his hat, and begged him to return, lest he should take cold; at which he laughed heartily, and bade her not be alarmed on his account, and nodding his head after her, both returned to their respective homes.

"It is very evident," thought Mary, as she proceeded along, "that this sea-captain is a very great oddity. I think he is either a little crack-brained, or else a very great humourist. Through all his bluntness, and his coarse appellations and sea-phrases, there is a ge-

genuine goodness of heart conspicuous, and it is easy to discern the *gentleman*, through the coarse manners which he so visibly assumes, to indulge some whim and casual eccentricity, till at length it has become habitual."

Just as she arrived at her own lodging, a letter was put into her hand. It bore the stamp of a foreign office, and from the variety of the post-marks, seemed to have travelled half round the kingdom, before it came into her possession. At first she thought it might be from Major Emerson, but observing it directed to the care of "*Mrs. Forester, Slope-lawn Cottage, near—*" and considering well the hand, she concluded it must be the long-expected answer from her brother. As she conjectured, so it proved to be. She broke open the seal, kissed his well-known signature at the bottom, and then read as follows :

"My dearest Sister,

"Words can ill describe the grief I have felt at your account of our beloved father's death. The loss of fortune is trivial compared to that most severe and irrepara-

ble calamity. Though death surrounds me in many shapes, and though I fear it not, I cannot contemplate the manner of my father's dissolution without horror, fearful that the derangement of his affairs might have caused a temporary derangement of mind, which urged him to commit the fatal deed, though you endeavour to attribute it to accident. For Heaven's sake, my dear Mary, ease my mind, and let me know how you and Hester are situated at present; whether you have left, as you intended, our native place, and in what line of life you are engaged. For bred up as you both were to no business, how can either of you turn to any eligible employment? I have heard a rumour from one of my brother officers, who has seen a *Major Emerson* lately arrived from England, and who declares he has known a Miss Irwin, on some *provincial stage*, far distant from her own native residence. He has described her as a most charming woman, and seems in raptures with her. Now as the name of Irwin, though not so very common, is by no means restricted to one or two branches, I sincerely hope it is neither you nor Hester, who has disgraced the name by so mean an occupation. Nothing but the most

transcendent abilities, with suitable encouragement, can, in my opinion, palliate such a rash and inconsiderate step; for, be assured of it, should I, on return to England, find either of you in such a public situation, nothing short of your immediate relinquishment will be the means of restoring you to my affections, and induce me to acknowledge either of you as my sister: but I sincerely hope it is some other person the Major has seen. I shall, in all probability, fall into company with that officer soon, when I shall be particular in my enquiries, for I assure you, my dear Mary, this intelligence has given me great uneasiness. Don't mistake me, I am neither narrow-minded nor a bigot. I believe it very possible for a woman to be *virtuous* and *prudent*, though an *actress*; but you must allow it is a line of life so public and exposed, that I think no young woman who is tenacious of her reputation, would embrace it by choice.

“ I have the pleasure to inform you, that I have lately succeeded to the command of a company. Not before I have earned it. While *subalterns*, dependent wholly on our pay, we are *nobody*; I now begin just to hold up my head a little. Had not that deceitful

scoundrel, my poor father's agent, embezzled twelve thousand pounds of his property; he might still have been alive and prosperous, and none of his children dependent on their own exertions. I shall depend on you, for a speedy answer; as for that lazy Hester, I know she pretends she can't spare time. I hope that may be the case, and not the old excuse. Remember me kindly and affectionately to Mrs. Forester, and likewise to Mr. Percy; tell him young Edward is at length a Captain. Present my duty to my Aunt Gordon, whose increasing piety has now an opportunity of extending protection to her destitute relatives, and pray remember me to our old nurse: believe me, dearest Mary, I shall account it an age, till you are enfolded in the longing embrace of

“ Your most truly

“ affectionate brother,

“ EDWARD IRWIN.

“ Write immediately on receipt of this.”

“ My good brother,” exclaimed Mary, as she finished reading, “ I find, entertains the same groundless prejudices against the stage in common with the generality of mankind. It is really a most unfortunate profession in

that single respect, being more than any other exposed to reprobation, and public animadversion. There is nothing but rising to the highest pinnacle of favour can serve as an excuse, and exculpate her who embraces it. Such must, and shall be, my study and endeavour. By that means alone, can I expect to retain my brother's regard, who, I find, would blush to own me as a *country-actress* ! Perhaps he is right. Let me for a moment suppose myself and our family as formerly, when we kept our carriage, and were universally visited by persons of rank and fashion. What would I have thought, had my brother Edward left his home, and embraced the life of a *country-actor* ? Would I not feel hurt, and consider him as *degenerate* ? I fear I should. If, therefore, reprehensible in a man, how much more so is it thought in a *woman* ! That it subjects a female to unwarrantable addresses I have unfortunately experienced ; and never will I rest satisfied, till, by perseverance, I secure a decent competency, which alone can render respectable a line of life otherwise so very objectionable."

Our Heroine determined, at all events, to deal candidly with her brother, but she resolved to argue the point ; and, well knowing

that he most tenderly loved her, she had strong hopes that his pride would yield to fraternal affection, and that on his return to England, he would hold her to his heart, and not disown her for his sister. She was aware that Major Emerson, if he met her brother, would immediately perceive the resemblance between them both, and this would in all probability lead to an acquaintance ; but she hoped the Major would preserve a silence, on his proposals to her. This she *supposed*, for she thought few men would voluntarily acknowledge a repulse in so tender a point ; and she rested satisfied, that so brave and honourable an officer would defend and advocate her character, if ever it was attempted to be called in question.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BEFORE Mary attempted to answer this letter, she earnestly wished to receive one from Mrs. Forester. Indeed she was surprised she had not received one from that worthy friend at the time that she received her brother's ; for she knew that none but that lady or Mr. Percy was acquainted with her address, and they were the only persons who could have forwarded her brother's letter. She determined therefore to wait another fortnight, that as she was almost certain of hearing from her within that space, she might have more ample means of acquainting her brother with the necessary intelligence relative to her aunt and sister ; for in her last she had pressed Mrs. Forester for information on that head.

Mrs. Forester had never been so long without answering, and Mary was apprehensive that illness had caused her silence ; she therefore dispatched a short letter to Mr. Percy, to make the necessary enquiry, at the same time acquainting him, that her brother was in good health, and had been promoted

to a captaincy : that he had begged her to remember him to his old tutor ; and to inform him of his promotion, as he knew he would participate in his good fortune. She likewise apprised the good man, that the son of his college friend, Doctor Emerson, had arrived on the continent, and had joined his regiment, but could give no further intelligence relative to the unhappy sister, and the merited misfortune that attended her seducer.

Mary, one afternoon, was sitting in a pensive mood, pondering in what manner to break the intelligence of her being in the theatric profession to her brother, and longing earnestly for a speedy letter from Mrs. Forrester, that she might transmit some account of their family, and satisfy, in some measure, his ardent enquiries, when a strange knock at the door announced a visitor. She heard a female voice enquiring for her, and recognizing the sound, she ran down stairs, and was soon in the embrace of her good friend Mrs. Mildmay.

“ My dear girl,” cried that affectionate lady, “ I am happy to find you have come to this town, and that I shall be able to spend a few days in your society ; I shall prolong

my visit at my brother's on your account. I congratulate you on winning his good opinion, for it is not easily acquired. I am arrived but yester-night from a fortnight's visit at *Rosegrove Park*, to Lady Rosebury."

"Before you give me any further information," said Mary, "I insist on your taking a cup of tea with me; so let me have the infinite satisfaction of entertaining my benefactress for the first time, but not the *last*, I hope, in my own apartments."

"To tell you the truth, I came with that intent," replied her visitor. "I had some difficulty to find you, for you did not leave your address with my brother, so I called at the theatre, and was informed by the stage-keeper of the place of your residence. When did you hear from our friend Mrs. Forester?"

"I am alarmed, my dear Madam, lest illness may have prevented her from answering my last. It is above a month since I wrote. She used to be very punctual. But I have intelligence that will please you; I have received a letter from my brother."

"Well, and how is he? How goes he on?" asked Mrs. Mildmay. "Edward and I used to be quite gracious."

“ Here is his letter, Madam,” said Mary; “ there is nothing it contains I wish to keep secret from you and my real friends.”

Mrs. Mildmay read it over, and as she returned it, observed with a smile, “ I see your brother entertains the same old rooted prejudice against the stage that is harboured by others. It is really a pity, that enlightened and otherwise unprejudiced people should be so set against a profession, that requires so much talent to support it. It must be from the vain and fruitless attempts of many whose efforts throw ridicule on the art, and sink it in the public estimation.”

“ I can compare such only to those itinerant and strict performers, those tormentors of catgut and torturers of time and sound, who would make us suppose it impossible that the same air should produce such different sensations, when executed by a *Cramer* or a *Weichsell*. I have really felt,” added Mary, “ not only apathy, but disgust at the unmeaning rant of some declaimers, while I have been electrified with the intellectual powers of a *Siddons*, and fancied the same sentences in her mouth were conveyed not only in a different language, but as expressing a quite different meaning. Such is the

effect of a just conception, with capability and powers to express it."

"I'll introduce you to a family, you will be delighted with. My niece, whom I have just returned from visiting, is passionately fond of the stage, and so is the Baronet her husband. I have already mentioned you to them, and they have requested me to bring you to the Park, as they long of all things for an introduction; so next week I'll take you, and we will spend a couple of days there. There is a great deal of company there, but none of your grand, stiff, and formal sort; and, among the rest, you will see the nephew of Mrs. Forester; he is first cousin to the Baronet, and a prodigious favourite with the family. He is a young gentleman bred to the bar, accounted a most eloquent pleader, and an enthusiastic admirer of the drama, so much so, that he has already produced one or two successful pieces on the London boards. You will be charmed with his conversation, I have no doubt."

"Ah! my dear Madam," returned Mary, taking her hand, "how happy shall I feel in such amiable society, far different from what I have hitherto experienced; in the short interval of my intercourse with the great, I

was soon made to feel the inferiority of my present situation. It will be some satisfaction to my harassed spirits to find, that my profession will be no bar to their countenance and favour, but, as you think, a recommendation."

"Most truly so," replied her friend; "therefore I communicate it with the greater pleasure. It is a most delightful mansion, about seven miles to the south-east of this town, and nearly five from the sea, of which there is a distant pleasing view. But delightful as the house and grounds are, they are not half so charming and agreeable as the inhabitants. Even my brother Mildmay ceases grumbling when he pays his niece a visit, and is as tame and good-natured as a Newfoundland dog. Who knows, but I may coax him to accompany us?"

"How will you contrive that, Madam?" said Mary, smiling.

"By endeavouring to persuade him against it, as I certainly shall strenuously oppose his bespeaking your benefit, the more eagerly obstinate will he be; I know my gentleman, and know how to deal with him."

"I am inclined to think his oddities are not natural, but assumed," Mary observed,

“as no man can behave, with all his roughness, more politely, which breaks through all his endeavours to conceal it.”

“To say the truth, my brother is no fool: he knows well with whom he can make free; and he has so long been accustomed to command, and to have all his orders complied with, that he dislikes such servile submission, and loves a little spirit of contradiction.”

“He complained to me, that you were too tame and sweet-tempered.”

“So I am, on purpose, in order to rouse him to a passion. He never enjoys his health so well as when his lungs are set a-going. And then he eats with such an appetite, though he finds fault with every thing, and after dinner falls fast asleep in his easy chair, from which indeed it would be high treason to disturb him.”

“His old house-keeper seems to understand him perfectly,” said Mary.

“Bless you, my dear,” cried Mrs. Mildmay, “she is a prodigious favourite, for he calls her all the names he can think on, and not the most *delicate* neither, but old Martha laughs at him, and sometimes tells him to his face, she doesn’t value him a piece of old

junk, or a rope's end. Do you know he has begun to call *you* names already."

"Indeed! and pray, Madam, what has he honoured me with."

"With little *Pussey*, and *Rose-bud*, and *Ugly-face*, and *Canny Wench*. So, you see, you are high on the list of promotion. If we can only get him to the Baronet's along with us, you will be highly diverted at his eccentricities; for Sir William has the most provoking method of rousing the Captain to the height of good humour, by many a pleasant sally, and a flat contradiction now and then."

"I promise myself much entertainment, and much happiness," replied our Heroine.

"You will find yourself under no restraint whatever, but be perfectly at home. There is a beautiful and select library of British authors and poets; that will be one of the first places you will be introduced to; there is also a small private theatre, very neatly fitted up with every requisite; that you are sure to see. I should not be surprised, now the house is full of company, if the Baronet and my niece should get up a private play, under the direction of the barrister, and with your advice and instructions."

“ I do not think myself adequate to so great a task, as to take upon me to instruct those, whose education has been so superior to mine. In the mere mechanical part of the stage business,” said Mary, “ I might be found serviceable ; but in no other way would I presume to interfere.”

“ Would you not undertake a part, if requested ?” asked Mrs. Mildmay.

“ Most willingly would I oblige, my dear Madam,” replied Mary, “ any friend of your’s ; but the permission of my Manager must first be granted, and that would be impossible to obtain. Nothing he detests so much as *private theatricals*. He says, and perhaps with some justice, it is the ruin of the profession, as the nobility and gentry are so engrossed in the preparations necessary, and the neighbourhood’s curiosity being so excited by cards of invitation for miles round, that the boxes at the theatre are absolutely deserted for a month previous to such exhibitions. This I have often heard him declare, and he turns all such representations into contempt and ridicule. So his consent is out of the question.”

“ It is very possible they have such a thing in view,” said Mrs. Mildmay, “ for I

heard them endeavouring to cast the old piece of "*Inkle and Yarico*:" all was settled, but the part of *Sir Christopher Curry*, upon which, my lively niece said, she would give any thing she could prevail upon her uncle Mildmay to undertake it, as it would suit him to a hair; and so laughed at the idea. So did Sir William; but *he* said, "the age of *miracles* and *chaos*, would return, before the Captain could be brought to tread any boards, but the *quarter-deck*." However, I don't despair of provoking my brother to the attempt. If so, we should have glorious sport. But I must leave you now, my dear. I am commissioned to invite you to dinner and tea to-morrow."

"It will be impossible for me to attend, for I perform *Jane Shore*, to-morrow evening," said Mary; "but the next day I shall be happy to wait on you."

"Be it so," returned her friend, "I will persuade my brother, by railing against your acting, to go and see you perform: and I am anxious to behold you myself, but he must think otherwise. I shall thwart and contradict him all the evening and to-morrow, till I work him to my purpose. So farewell for the present."—Mary descended with Mrs.

Mildmay to the door, who kindly pressed her hand as she parted from her.

Poor Mary felt quite elated at this friendly visit, and the sight of her old friend, for whom, next to Mrs. Forester, she entertained the highest respect and veneration. The promised introduction to so amiable a family, as Sir William's was described to be, was now uppermost in her thoughts; and she hoped the rational, yet enlivening intercourse she should enjoy in such society, would compensate for the past mortification she had so patiently endured. The next morning, she communicated the news to her friend, Miss Thompson; that worthy girl was delighted at the intelligence, and in order to mortify some persons in the Green-room, asked Mary when she was next to dine with her *Guardian*, Captain Mildmay, and go with him and his sister, to Sir William's, his nephew, at Rosegrove Park. Mary replied, she was engaged to dine with the Captain the next day, and in about a week, she was to spend a few days at the Park.

"I don't think I can spare you, Miss," said Mr. P——. "Pleasure must yield to business; and though your name may not

be in the bills next week, nor the week after, for we can do without you, you see, yet I may change the play, or somebody may be taken ill, so your services may be required. Is that old brute, that Captain Mildmay, *your guardian*, Miss?"

"So it seems, Sir," answered Mary, coolly.

"I give you joy, my dear," said the Manager, "if you can humour him: you have but one more to please, and that is the devil himself; for of all the savage old Turks that ever existed, he is the greatest. He bespoke a play about two years back, for one of our worst performers, because, it seems, he had a large family, and he filled the house with such a motley crew; but it did not serve the performer much, for I discharged him for it at the end of the town, for which this old brute of an officer took up the cudgels, and so abused me, calling me such names, as *Hunks*, and *Gripe*, and *Grubb*, and old *Skin-flint*, and *Callous Gizzard*, and absolutely set his dogs after me, when last year I waited on him for his name; egad, I was glad to make my escape; no, he'll never darken my doors again, I warrant, and I don't want his company."

“I should be very happy to have his name at the head of *my* bills,” said Miss Thompson, “*brute* as he is.”

“And so should *I*,” cried Mr. Grimes, “and so would *any* of us, even Mrs. Crawley, and the *Manager* himself, for all he talks in this manner ; now declare honestly, Mr. P——, if the Captain was to send word for you to put his name on the top of next Monday’s bill of fare, would you send for answer, ‘you did not want his company?’ ”

“Why, no, that would be so *rude*,” replied the Manager : “we should *forget* and *forgive* ; and as Sir Christopher remarks, ‘confound the fellow who is ungenerous enough to remember the bad actions of a man, who has virtue enough left in his heart to repent them.’ I think it is a thing he ought to do ; the least recompense he could make after abusing me with such opprobrious language ; *he*, a *gentleman* ?”

“He certainly is,” said Sharpe, the Prompter. “I have seen him saluted lowly by many persons of rank, and on the most friendly terms with them. He is known to be a very charitable, humane man, and if he does now and then knock a man down with

one hand, he is sure to stretch the other out immediately to raise him up."

"I wish he would be charitable enough," cried Mr. P——, "to stretch his charitable hand out to me, for if any man was ever knocked down by words, I have met that treatment."

"He don't think you want it, Mr. P——," said Mr. Staines. " '*Sharp misery has not worn you to the bone.*' "

"No, thank Heaven!" exclaimed the Manager; "but if he looked into the Theatre sometimes, he might see '*a beggarly account of empty boxes.*' "

"He must drop in very early then," said Grimes; "for, in general, there is little room for complaint."

Mr. P—— was now summoned, as the Box-keeper wanted to speak with him. "Dear, dear," said the Manager, in a fidget, "what can he want of me? can't he settle his box-plan without me," and away he went. Presently he returned, rubbing his hands, and chuckling: "Well, I declare, I never—who could have believed it? But talk of the devil, and, sure enough, he appears; for this Captain has just now insisted on having the right-hand stage-box, for to-

night. He wants to see you perform, Miss Irwin. Now Sir William Rosebury and his family sent early this morning for places, and this box, and the next was fixed on, so I have removed them to the *left* side, for the old Captain insists on the *right*, and won't sit in any other. I don't think he would give place to the Admiral, so I was even obliged to humour the old boy, since he has come round. There was a comely, good-natured looking lady along with him, who wanted to dissuade him against coming to the play at all, declaring it was all nonsense, and loss of time. I could have wished her at Old Harry ; but the more she was against it, the more he opposed her, and persisted ; and he swore she should come with him, or turn out of hammock from his house ; so he actually took and paid for the whole box for ten places. Wonders, I am sure, will never cease."

" You see," said Miss Thompson, "*Miss Irwin's* name can still attract as *Jane Shore*."

" And why not Mrs. Crawley's *Alicia*, as *much*, if not *more*," replied Mrs. Benson. " I am sure there is no comparison."

" Most assuredly there is none," said Mr. Staines, bowing ambiguously.

“I think *my* name,” cried Mrs. Crawley, “must be, to the full, as attractive as a *stranger’s*, any day; and you all know, I have been a favourite here for several seasons, and have been applauded——”

“*To the very echo that shall applaud again!*” exclaimed Rantrem.

“The Captain always highly applauded me, and has been heard to say, if ever he bespoke again, it would be for *my* benefit,” said the tragic queen. “I shall lose no time in reminding him of his promise, and he is too honourable not to keep his word.”

“I would apply by all means,” cried Grimes, “now he is in the cue, Mrs. Crawley, lest some fresh whim or caprice should make him alter his mind.”

“I most assuredly shall,” cried Mrs. Crawley. “If he is Miss Irwin’s *Guardian*, I think, for his credit’s sake, he should make her quit the stage, so disgraceful to an heiress.”

“Whatever I am heir to, and I shall have something, when of age,” replied Mary, “is not sufficient, without other endeavours, and this he knows, and approves the step I have taken.”

“And will bespeak your benefit, no doubt,” said Mrs. Benson.

“ I have not hinted any such thing,” returned Mary, “ and I shall never solicit such a favour.”

“ I commend your modesty, my dear,” said Miss Thompson ; “ and I wish the sanguine hope of others, all the success it deserves.”

Mary and her friend now left the Theatre, and returned home together. On their way, Mary told her that Captain Mildmay had offered his name for her benefit, of his own accord, and totally unthought of by her.

“ If so,” replied Miss Thompson, “ be assured of this, your stay will not be long in this Theatre ; you will, thereby, lose all favour with the Manager ; his growing coolness will burst forth into a downright rupture : so be advised, and write circular letters for a situation. Be before-hand with him, if possible, and let your dismissal come from yourself. I’ll furnish you with a proper list. I dare say, you cannot fail of succeeding. I shan’t remain long after you.”

Mary determined to follow her friend’s advice. She found she was no longer a reigning favourite with Mr. P——, and his discharging a poor performer for no other reason, but obtaining superior interest to

himself, was a blot in the Manager's escutcheon she by no means approved, and lowered him much in her estimation.

As a party was to be present, whom it was her interest and wish to please, and who had never yet been at the Theatre to see her perform, she was resolved to exert herself to the utmost, to win their approbation. She knew that Mrs. Mildmay would carry a just report of her back to Mrs. Forester; and she was doubly solicitous that it should be a favourable one. She, therefore, read over the part accurately, reconsidered it attentively, and then laid out a most appropriate dress for the character. When she went to the house, she found the pit and gallery doors were thronged, by persons waiting for admittance. This augured a good house; but it was a tragedy that seldom failed to attract the middling, and the lower orders. Her wish was to behold the boxes filled, and in this she was not disappointed, for the noise Captain Mildmay made at her entrance, his loud clapping, which was answered by Sir William and his party opposite, for a moment drew her attention, and she perceived she was greeted by a very numerous assemblage in the boxes, that

drew from her a profound curtsey, as an acknowledgment. Her exertions met with their deserved success. She never acquitted herself so well in that part ; every *point* she made *told*, and even her *silent looks* drew forth approving exclamations.

In the dying scene, when *Jane Shore* is pushed rudely by the Porter, from *Alicia's* door, there was a short interruption, somewhat ludicrous too, which, for a time, distressed our Heroine. The fact was, the honest Captain's mind was so wholly engrossed in the scene before him, that he actually took it for *reality*, and damned the Porter aloud, for a *callous-gizzard Scoundrel* in shutting the door in her face ; and when she sunk on the ground, he cried, " There now ! she's dying ! and nobody will raise her up, and relieve her !" and he was on the motion of throwing his silk purse to her, when his sister pulled him down, and reminded him where he was ; on this he came to his *r  collection*, and laughed heartily. At length, order was restored, and the play concluded with unusual applause.

Next day, when she went to dine at the Captain's, according to invitation, " So ho ! there, you sly puss," cried he, " have

you started in view again? Let me see no false colours, *no* pure red and white, my Rose-bud—not starved to death, I see; how the plague did you contrive to fall away so, and look so miserably pale and wan, hey? By the soul of Nelson, I thought you were dying in earnest. If it had not been for Mrs. *Milk-and-water* there, who pulled me back, I believe I should have jumped on the stage, and turned your tragedy into a comedy. But give me your hand, you died well, and as a Christian ought, quite penitent, and every body was sorry for you but my insensible sister, who sat as composed, and as smooth as a duck-pond. She had the impudence to laugh at me, for looking a little grave, for you made the salt water run from me, I'm not ashamed to own it; and you cost me two shillings for a good glass, to coil up my spirits, and to set 'em a-float, for they had ebbed to low water-mark; so, since you have recovered from your starving fit, and have regained your flesh and appetite, let me see what havock you'll make when dinner comes."

Our Heroine being in excellent spirits, and highly pleased with her reception from the Captain, did ample justice to his table,

and tasted every dish he recommended. "I am gander enough to be partial to a good roast stubble goose, stuffed in the vulgar way, with sage and onions, and apple-sauce; so let me help you to the merry-thought; my squeamish sister can't bear it, the smell, it seems, overcomes her, but she don't know what is good."

"No, Sir," cried Mary, "that she don't, if she dislikes sage and onion; and I think," added she, smiling and humouring him, "a little *garlic* or *assa fætida* would be a great addition to the gravy." "So it would," cried Mildmay, "*garlic* is particularly wholesome, and much used abroad; it is a powerful expeller of the wind."

"Indeed, brother," said Mrs. Mildmay, "you will compel me to rise from table, if you go on in this manner."

"Come, come, sister, wash down the goose and the garlic with a bumper of good East India Madeira, and we'll remove the subject with the cloth."

The conversation now turned on the family at Rosegrove Park. Mrs. Mildmay said she would call on Mary early some morning, the next week, and take a walk with her there, and introduce her.

“ *A walk ! no*, that you shan’t,” exclaimed the Captain, “ it would be too much. *I’ll* take her in a post-chaise myself, and perhaps I may condescend to let *you* ride with us. What think you, if we set off to-morrow morning ?”

“ I am quite agreeable, Sir,” said Mary.

Mrs. Mildmay made an objection, in order to urge her brother to the very point she wished ; and it was settled before Mary left the Captain’s, that they would call for her, and take her up at nine the next morning.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARY had finished her breakfast, and was prepared for her trip to Rosegrove Park, when she heard the post-chaise stop at her lodgings, and out jumped Captain Mildmay. "Where are you, *Ugly-face!* hey?" cried he, as he ascended the stairs: "that's right," for Mary met him, and led him to her sitting-room. "I see you are well rigged, in prime sailing order, and ready to weigh anchor, and drop down with the tide. Could not have a finer day, nor a fairer wind, Rosebud, hey?"

"It is a glorious morning, Sir," replied Mary; "but is not Mrs. Mildmay in the carriage; why would she not walk up?"

"Never mind her," said the brother, "she is safely stowed in one corner of the chaise, and I have just mounted aloft, to have a peep at your state-cabin; that's all snug enough, I see. But, come, bear a hand with me, and we'll steer our course straight for the Park."

Our Heroine was seated in the middle,

and the Captain occupied the other corner, and the chaise drove briskly off. The ride was remarkably pleasant, and in about an hour and a quarter they were set down at Sir William's elegant mansion. Sir William and his lady received their uncle and aunt with that friendly and cordial respect, that evidently showed how welcome their presence was. Mrs. Mildmay immediately presented Mary to the Baronet and his wife.

“ Yes,” cried the Captain, “ I have brought *Rose-bud* here, Miss *Ugly-Face* : she is ‘ a *canny wench*,’ an’t she?— I had no notion so valuable a prize should set sail without convoy, so the old man of war, though the gout had laid an embargo on his timbers for the last two months, no sooner than it was taken off, tired of being laid up in ordinary so long, he has, with the first fair wind, slipped out and made for this port, where we shall cast anchor for a couple of days ; what say you ? hey ? is your ship so crowded with passengers that you can’t stow us with ease ; if so, we’ll only lie to, for a few hours, and hoist sail again.”

“ You shall have your old cabin, Captain, where your window has a full view of your natural element,” replied the Baronet ; “ and

for my aunt and Miss Irwin, whose visit we esteem a particular favour, we have provided a two-bedded apartment, judging it would be more agreeable to the young lady, whom we entreat to consider herself as perfectly at home."

There was a cheerful frankness about Sir William and Lady Rosebury, that immediately won the confidence, and removed at once all diffidence and restraint from our Heroine. She returned them her thanks with a becoming ease, that proved she had been accustomed to polished society, which made a most favourable impression on the company present.

They were just going to breakfast. Captain Mildmay cast a wistful eye upon some cold tongue, and requested his nephew to help him to some, while Mary did not object to a cup of chocolate after her ride.

The Baronet was a jolly, portly man, about thirty-six. Good humour was strongly portrayed in his countenance, and there was an archness in his manner which promised to afford much entertainment from his previous knowledge of his uncle's eccentricities. Lady Rosebury bore a strong resemblance to Mrs. Mildmay in her features,

and there was as striking a likeness in their dispositions. She was a lively, agreeable little woman of thirty, totally free from affectation and consequential reserve. Their two children, William and Eliza, the boy about ten, and the girl turned of seven years, were particularly engaging, and Mary had not been an hour in their company, when they seemed closely attached to her.

Among the visitors most conspicuous, was a fat elderly maiden lady, a Mrs. Butcher. So far from the usual asperity, which characterizes ladies that have so long remained single, she was the very picture of good humour and cheerful content. There was a tall raw-boned Scots gentleman, who had formerly been surgeon to a Highland regiment, and who was particularly attentive to this lady, and seemed almost seriously devoted to her, and to his capacious *Scot's mull*, filled with the most pungent *Gillespie*, "*which ever and anon he gave his nose*," a protuberance no less remarkable than his *broad dialect*, which, in spite of travel and a sound education, remained in its pristine purity, unmixed with baser matter, or the corruptions of a more southern and polished intercourse. He was

an old bachelor of fifty-seven, and Mrs. Butcher might be a few years younger.

Whether Doctor Andrew M'Lancie's attentions were purely disinterested or not, we shall not take upon us to decide ; for, certain it is, the lady had a comfortable independence. That this might contribute to her cheerfulness, there is little doubt, as there is nothing tends more to *ease of mind*, than *ease* in our *circumstances*. The Doctor himself was not perhaps quite so fortunate, but there was no observable deficiency, as a rigid economy regulated all his movements. He was a learned and intelligent man, but tenacious of his opinions, and somewhat of a satirical turn.

The next characters we shall just sketch are Squire Blunt and his son Richard. The father, a man of great estate, but of unpolished manners, thought an *Englishman* the only estimable person in existence, and despised every one who was not as rich as himself. He hated foreigners, had a contempt for trade and commercial pursuits, and his understanding was confined within the limits of his property, while horses, hounds, and the sports of the field engrossed his sole

attention. The son was as uncultivated as the father, and an overgrown booby.

Mrs. Euston, sister to Lawyer Dalton, an eminent attorney in the neighbourhood, was a widow in easy circumstances, with a fund of local information and very communicative. She was by no means ill-natured in her remarks. She had a strong predilection for cards, but was frequently a loser, owing to her inattention to the hand she held, as the slightest occurrence would call her thoughts away, and set her tongue in motion. This unfortunate propensity did not escape the notice of the shrewd Caledonian, who failed not to turn it to his advantage. However, she lost with a good grace, and it was easy to see, by the smile on the rigid muscles of the North Briton, and the compliments he paid to her knowledge and skill, that he was by no means a partner in her losses.

The two Miss Simplers were co-heiresses, under the guardianship of Mr. Dalton, and resided at his house, where the widow Euston also lived, her brother being likewise a widower without incumbrance.— They were insipid characters, and had not

long returned from a very eminent boarding-school.

A principal visitor was a most amiable lady, a Viscountess Armsfield, whose speaking features forcibly depicted strong intellect and native goodness of heart; but there was a pensive placidity throughout her deportment, that too plainly evinced to the eye of discernment, while *she* endeavoured to make *others* happy, she was not perfectly so herself; though the Viscount was a most worthy character, and the best of husbands. Their benevolence was extensive, though secretly applied; for their fortune was not commensurate with their rank, and much less so to their deserts. From the first moment of Mary's entrance, the attention of Lady Armsfield was irresistibly attracted towards her, and our Heroine felt an instantaneous and similar impulse, blended with admiration and tender respect.

As soon as breakfast was ended, Lady Rosebury, willing to oblige her uncle and aunt, took Mary's hand, and led her to Lord and Lady Armsfield, by whom she was received with every mark of attention, and particularly with a solicitude and an earnest and pensive tenderness, on the part of the Vis-

countess, seldom witnessed on a first introduction.

The company were now about separating on their individual morning's pursuits, when a tall and elegant young gentleman made his appearance. "Where have you been all the morning?" cried Sir William. "I have only to tell you, you have lost your breakfast, my good Coz, that's all."

"I have been upon business of importance, I assure you, which I have settled to my satisfaction, and to Lady Armsfield's."

"Business in the long vacation, Coonselor," exclaimed Doctor M'Lancie, "is not, as I ken it, congenial to the feelings of the long robe, but, with humble submission, quite out of the routine of general practice."

"I believe," said Squire Blunt, "you practitioners of law and physic never let a *client* or *patient* slip through your fingers at any season, but willingly undertake any case or cause, however desperate, as long as the *fees* are forthcoming."

"I must confess," replied the Barrister, "I am amply repaid for the cause I advocated, and which has terminated successful-

ly ; and though I have lost my *breakfast*, I have not lost my *cause*, nor my appetite for *dinner*, which few *justices* would neglect for *any* business."

" Ho ! ho ! ho !" cried the North Briton, " have a care, Coonsellor, how you arraign the conduct of the *quorum*, who are aw men of *sapient* understanding, consummate *abee-lities*, acknowledged *leeturature*, and profound *erudeetion*, as ye mun confess in the learned instance afore ye."

" As far as *Burn's Justice* goes," cried the Squire, " I'll yield in opinion to no man, not to the Lord Chancellor, nor the Lord Chief Justice himself."

" Come, come, gentlemen," cried Sir William, laughing ; " these proceedings are not strictly legal ; and I believe, Doctor, there is no *medical* opinion wanted on the subject."

" Yer observation, Sir William," replied the Scotsman, " is parfitly in point, and I boo to yer detarmination, wi' as muckle deferance and respect, as I would to a consultation of physeecians, or the deceesion of a medical board."

" Avast !" thundered out Captain Mildmay, " belay, belay, and burn your law and

physic for me ; I have suffered from both. What say you, gentlefolks, for a land-cruise this morning ? Let's steer to the coast, and snuff up the *sea breeze* ; 'twill be high water by one o'clock, and 'tis not quite two leagues off."

" Wi' aw my heart and saul," returned the Doctor ; " I ha' ploughed the ocean wi' the auld Heighland Watch, the forty-second regiment, of auncient celeebriety, and ancoonter muckle storms by sea and land wi' that gallant and distinguished corps ; and I mun say, that the sea-air is a great corroborant to the constitution, and the animal economy."

" True, Doctor," cried Mildmay, " so give me a pinch from your *mull*, though it is not quite so capacious as the *Mull of Galloway*."

" Yer reight, Captain," said the Caledonian : " though they be not exactly synonymous tarms, they are equally beneficial to bodily health, as I ha' kenned by experience."

" We shall leave the ladies to their own discretion," said Sir William ; " but I am aware our friends, Mrs. Butcher and Mrs. Euston, are fond of a morning's ride, and

I shall be happy to accommodate them with a side-saddle each."

"Oh! mercy," exclaimed Mrs. Butcher, laughing, "pray have some compassion, Sir William, on your Lady's favourite bay poney; the poor animal would never be able to go through the *weight* of the *obligation* I should lay him under."

"No, no, good Sir William," cried Mrs. Euston, "let us have your landau, and the Doctor shall ride with us; he can then describe to us the different effects of the land and sea breeze, and we hope to receive the benefit of his observations."

"I shall," returned the Doctor, with a profound bow, "with aw imaginable pleasure, accompany ye, ladies; ainly I am afraid my loquacity on ony favourite topic that comes within the ken of my observation, may interrupt the profound cogitations of our worthy friend, Mrs. Euston, whose general taciturnity makes her few remarks *sae weel-timed*, and *placed*, as to turn to the advantage of those who have the inexpressible feleecity to witness their sage effect."

The parties for the excursion were soon formed. The greatest difficulty was, to mount Captain Mildmay to his liking. The

Squire politely offered his own capital hunter, observing, that he would engage his horse would clear a five feet wall standing, or a double ditch in a hand-gallop.

“Slack sail there, Master Justice,” cried the Captain; “you want to take me all a-back, and unship me, that won’t do. Where’s old Thetis, your grey mare, Nephew? She swam across your river with me, about four years ago, when I was half-seas-over, and arrived safe on the opposite shore; by instinct, I caught hold of the tiller, her mane, and clung to it, till we landed, when I fell overboard on dry land, among the gravel and stones, and got wounded in the heel, like Achilles. However, if she is still able to make a little way, she may go four or five knots an hour, and that’s tight sailing enough for me, *a-shore*.”

“She shall be at your service, Uncle, in ten minutes,” said Sir William, as he went out.

“Four or five miles an hour! I have a road-hack,” exclaimed the Squire, “that will trot twelve miles with ease, without turning a hair. Why that’s no more than a snail’s crawl. You’re a *coward*.”

“Every man in his element, Master Lands-

man," returned the irritated Captain. " *Coward!* overhaul that word. If I had you in the Bay of Biscay, on board a pin-nace, I'd soon see who would be the coward; but I pity your ignorance: you have seen nothing of the world, if you have not been at sea."

"Wi' aw due respect to yer nautical knowledge, Captain," said the Doctor, "ye are for once oot in your reckoning; ken ye not the old proverb?"

'Cælum, non Animam mutant; qui trans Mare currunt.'

"Ay, ay," cried Mildmay, "*current!* you're right, Doctor; if the *current* is in our favour, all's well."

The Caledonian grimly smiled at the Captain's ignorance of Latin, and the stupid stare of the Squire, and took a large spoonful of Gillespie from his mull, as a temporary relief, while he escorted the two ladies, Butcher and Euston, to the carriage in waiting. The cavalcade shortly after set forward.

The Viscountess, Lady Rosebury, Mrs. Mildmay, and Mary withdrew to the library, and were, shortly after, joined by the Counsellor. Mary was now introduced to him as being a particular favourite of Mrs. Forrester, the Barrister's aunt-in-law.

“ Though I have not had the happiness of beholding my Aunt, these many years, the reverence I bear her, and the high opinion I entertain of her sense and known virtues, must render the person she approves, most truly estimable in my eyes ;” and he took our Heroine’s hand, which he pressed in the most tender and respectful manner.

“ How long is it, Miss Irwin,” asked he, “ since you have seen my Aunt Forester ?”

“ Not quite six months, Sir,” returned Mary : “ when last I heard from her, she was in perfect health.”

“ You correspond with her, then ?”

“ Frequently, Sir ; it is my pride, my only consolation. Without her friendly counsel, I were poor indeed. To her alone am I indebted for every present advantage ; for since the death of my mother, she has proved a second parent to me ; and her solicitude on my account has been redoubled, since the recent and sudden loss of my father.”

An involuntary sigh now escaped Mary, which was responded by young Forester, while he tenderly exclaimed, “ An *orphan*, then !”

“Most truly so,” replied she; “yet not destitute, nor friendless, while I have the inestimable blessing of retaining her good opinion. Mrs. Mildmay knows how much I stand indebted to her invaluable care.”

“I know not really, my dear girl,” said her friend present, “the full extent of your obligations to that amiable woman; but of this I am convinced, she could not have bestowed her favours on a more grateful, or more deserving person, whose talents and conduct could better justify her discernment.”

“Your partiality towards me, Madam,” returned our Heroine, “is derived from the same amiable source. May I never, by word or deed, forfeit the regard of those who have thus condescended to befriend me!”

“*Amen! to that sweet prayer!*” returned the Barrister, with fervency. There was something so touching and interesting in Mary’s manner and expression, that involuntarily caused that energetic response, while the Viscountess’s eyes filled with a sympathetic tear, as she surveyed the modest and humble blush, that suffused poor Mary’s cheeks, and added a deeper tint to

the carnation hue, which always embellished her animated countenance.

“ Pray, William,” said Lady Rosebury, addressing the Counsellor, “ let us hear the adventures of the morning, now you have *refreshed* yourself; for though I know no personal privation can deter you, when humanity calls, you are not yet a perfect chameleon to feed on air.”

“ The temporary relief the Viscountess had the goodness to entrust with me, for the succour of that poor deserving family, will, I have the pleasure to inform her, prove permanently serviceable. So frequently does a trifle become of magnitude, when timely and judiciously bestowed; and for the lawsuit, I shall undertake the cause myself.”

“ Then,” cried the Viscountess, “ I foresee the end—the triumph of eloquence and humanity, over injustice and oppression. I am satisfied.”

Mary was admiring the classic arrangement of the library, when young Forester joined her.

“ Sir William has displayed considerable taste in the disposal of his books, in the different languages, ancient and modern, not

for *ocular* effect, as you may plainly discover, but by considering the dates and eras ; the slightest inspection will direct you to the volume required. Some ancient authors have been sent to the *tailors* of literature."

"Tailors !" exclaimed Mary, in surprise.

"O yes," returned the Barrister ; "the *book-binders* ; for whatever merit an author may possess, unless his *outside* appearance recommend him to some attention, his merits are not looked into ; whereas, many a writer has been read, ay, and approved of, from the recommendation of good type, and hot-pressed paper, elegantly bound and gilt."

"You are not, Sir, I fancy, quite so fastidious," said our Heroine.

"I am, Miss Irwin," replied Mr. Forester, "not quite so particular as *some* ; merit is often hid under a homely garb. The rugged coat of an *oyster* frequently contains a *pearl* within, of inestimable lustre. I esteem an author only from the information he contains, and for the taste and genius he displays. It grieves me, therefore, to see men of real abilities too frequently slighted from their inability to appear with that respectability their merits are entitled to. Imprudence may be the cause in some few, but

by far the *greater* part suffer, from the *par-simony* and *ignorance* of *publishers*, who judge not for themselves, but submit to their *readers'* opinion, who must find *some* fault, to show their judgment, which, consequently, *depreciates* the work in the *purchaser's* eyes."

"More is the pity!" sighed Mary.

" ' 'Tis true, 'tis pity, and pity 'tis, 'tis true;' therefore, when I meet with an old author lying neglected on a book-stall, I take him home with me, and when I have formed my opinion of his merit, I send him to my *literary* tailor, my *book-binder*, to furnish him with a new suit, that he may be able to make his appearance in company with his contemporaries, of *less internal* worth, but of more respectable *exterior*; and I have the satisfaction of beholding many of these old friends taken familiarly in hand, by nobility, who would otherwise be suffered to moulder on the shelf in contempt, and consequent obscurity."

"How kind of you, Sir! how considerate!" returned our Heroine, "to cherish neglected merit."

"I am not singular, Miss Irwin," replied the Barrister; "a young nobleman, a friend

of mine, and a writer of celebrity himself, has patronized more than one living author. But merit, and even a pleasing *exterior*, are not sufficient recommendations, in some men's eyes. Thinking to serve this man of merit, but of humble origin, he introduced him to an *illustrious* character, as our modern *Anacreon*. His works had been previously read, and praised by this great personage. He was received with a smile of condescension, and questioned, if he belonged (as the name was similar) to the family of a noble Marquis? The humble individual confessed he had not that *honour*. The cool indifference which ensued, convinced both him and his noble patron, there was nothing to hope from that high introduction; and he has remained unnoticed to this hour. But let a man of *fortune* or of *title* write, his works are sure of a high purchase, and are read with avidity; nay, it would be an unpardonable omission to be without them. So much for *modern* appreciation of talent."

"It is a melancholy reflection, Sir," said Mary, "that merit of *itself*, is not a sufficient recommendation. *Interest*, in general, supersedes it; and in my short experience,

I have witnessed the fluctuation of public favour."

"Not *personally*, I hope, Miss Irwin?" returned Mr. Forester.

"I have, in general, been peculiarly fortunate; as I have met with unlooked-for countenance and support, far beyond my poor deserts. But I have seen very superior talents pass unnoticed, for want of that necessary appendage."

"When all that can fascinate the eye and the understanding, unite in the same person, that heart must be wholly insensible, which owns not its power." Saying this, he took Mary's hand, and with peculiar grace and emphasis, repeated the following lines:

"How much superior beauty awes,
The *coldest* bosoms find;
But with resistless force it draws,
To *sense* and *sweetness* join'd.
The casket, when to outward show,
The workman's art is seen,
Is *doubly* valu'd, when we know
It holds a *gem* within!"

The manner, the tone, and the look which accompanied these few lines, were not unheeded; on the contrary, our young Actress felt a sensation she had never yet ex-

perienced. We confess, it was a *favourable* impression ; the truth is, she felt highly gratified in being thus complimented by a gentleman of acknowledged worth and abilities, who not only bore the *name*, but seemed to possess the estimable qualities of her earliest benefactress. Instinctively she was convinced, it was not an unmeaning, *transitory* compliment, and a tender gratitude was inspired in her gentle bosom, with a secret wish she might prove worthy of the flattering allusion, so delicately, yet so pointedly expressed.

As he moved towards Lady Rosebury and the Viscountess, she ventured to raise her timid eyes, and steal a look at him unnoticed. His figure was tall, and his person elegantly formed, though slender. His complexion was rather pale, arising more from a studious habit and a contemplative mind, than from any natural ailment ; for he occasionally glowed with animation, and every feature corresponded with the sentiment he uttered. His eyes were the windows of his soul, and bespoke the virtuous and energetic resident within. He might be twenty-eight or more, in appearance, though in reality no more than twenty-seven. Such was the

Counsellor, the nephew and heir of Mr. Forester, the deceased and ever-lamented partner of her amiable and invaluable friend.

The ladies now requested the Barrister to escort them in a small walk round the pleasure-grounds, while they visited the flower-garden and hot-houses. "Perhaps," said he, "Miss Irwin would prefer remaining in this *literary* parterre, and cull the flowers of Parnassus, and refresh herself at the stream of Helicon?"

"Much as I admire the flowers of *literature*, the works of nature," said Mary, "claimed ever my principal attention. I can there behold the sublime and beautiful! and am equally lost in rapture, while I contemplate the *minute*, but no less wonderful display of Providence through all his works. The book of nature is laid before us, from the majestic folio, to the most diminutive; and no leaves do I peruse with more satisfaction, than the highly embellished and illuminated ones, which a well cultivated garden displays. The beautiful variety of colour and shade, the perfume they exhale, equally contribute, in my humble idea, to the *mind's* as to the body's health, and I shall most willingly and thankfully accompany you."

“ You have read Hervey’s Meditations,” asked the Barrister, “ and consequently admire them, Miss Irwin ? ”

“ To read them even *casually* must be to admire them, Sir ; and though their tendency may appear, to some inconsiderate minds, somewhat too serious and grave, to *me* they are not the less pleasing ; the drooping willow, bending o’er the babbling stream, attracts me more, than the loftier and more luxuriant products of the forest, though all claim and direct my admiration and thanks to the bounteous Giver.”

As they proceeded, “ What flower, Miss Irwin,” asked Mr. Forester, “ is your favourite ? ”

“ I am vulgar enough to esteem the *rose*, before any other, Sir.”

“ You are not singular,” replied the Counsellor, “ for it preserves its sweetness and its virtues when decayed. We are frequently partial to what bears any similitude to ourselves. The rose, my dear Miss Irwin, is an emblem of yourself. Its sweetness leaves a lasting impression, which time cannot efface.”

“ You are not, Sir,” replied Mary, with an arch smile, “ fully aware of the extent of

that compliment ; for amid all this glowing sweetness, I must carry something *repulsive* and *sharp* about me."

" I do not exactly comprehend you," returned he.

" The rose-tree produce *thorns* as well as *flowers*," she replied.

" True," answered he, " and wisely has Nature so ordained it. The thorns which encompass that beauteous flower, are placed as a *guard* and *defence* against the rude hand of those, who would tear it from the stem : so are the virtues which adorn the soul of beauty ; and Miss Irwin's mind, equally repellant to the unhallowed touch of libertines, who would meet the punishment of their presumptuous attempt, in their rejection and disappointment."

Lady Rosebury and the Viscountess, with Mrs. Mildmay, now joined them, and they sauntered for a full hour, amid a profusion of sweets, and variety. The sun shone with a brilliant yet mild radiance, which with the melodious warbling of the little feathered choristers, that hopped from spray to spray, diffused a cheerful, gay serenity around.

" Here, ladies," exclaimed the advocate

of the surrounding and enchanting scenery, "here is the volume of Nature unfolded to the enraptured eye. Here is food for contemplation ; whether we behold the extent of the plain beneath, the wide expanse of the distant ocean, the rugged cliffs that border it, or, turning to the right, survey yon solemn wood's impervious shade, backed by the majestic range of towering hills ; which way soever we look, the mind is filled with wonder and delight. Here, with the immortal bard, may we prove,

" A life like this, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running
 brooks,
Sermons in stones, and *good* in every thing."

The conversation now became general, and in a short time they returned to the house. Mary enjoyed the walk, with a satisfaction she had never before experienced. She felt perfectly at ease, in the familiar intercourse with those who sought to please her, and treated her with such unexpected kindness and respect. The tear of grateful sensibility glistened in her eye ; and the presence of Mrs. Forester and Mr. Percy, was

alone wanting, to render her present happiness complete.

About four o'clock the cavalcade returned from their morning's ride. The first who appeared were the two Miss Simplers in full canter, followed by the young Squire Richard, in a round gallop, on his chesnut hunter. Presently after came Squire Blunt himself, Sir William and Lawyer Dalton, trotting and laughing merrily along. In a few minutes, the landau arrived, from which descended Doctor M'Lancie, who, with a muscular arm and an obsequious *boo*, helped Mrs. Butcher, as she squeezed herself through the carriage door, and made the step bend and creak under its burden. Then alighted Lord Armsfield, who politely gave the lively Mrs. Euston his hand, as she sprung from the vehicle to the ground.

"Hey day ! folks," cried Mrs. Mildmay, "what's become of the Captain? what have you done with my brother? where is your uncle, Sir William?"

"He was overtaken by a sad misfortune," said Sir William, very gravely. "I hope he has recovered from it, but I much fear."

“Nay, no bantering, nephew, nothing serious could have happened, as your laughing so heartily when you approached plainly tells me.”

“The Captain will best explain the accident himself,” said the Lawyer. “’Twas a sad *errour* in *judgment*. He is *non-suited*, I fancy, at present ; but if he pays the costs, he may chance to recover.”

“*Non-suited*,” cried the Squire ; “I believe you ; I should have stripped from head to foot. I would not have such a wet jacket for fifty pounds.”

“’Twas ainly a dip in his natural element,” said the Doctor, “sae na ill effects may be dreaded fra’ sic a cause.” The company now separated to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER XX.

DINNER was just ended, and the dessert on the table, when Captain Mildmay made his appearance.

“What cheer, mess-mates,” cried he, “hey? the decks cleared already?”

“Here comes Neptune, the briny god of the sea! just risen from his watery couch. What news from the deep? I thought you were food for the sharks by this, Captain,” cried Lawyer Dalton.

“*Sharks!*” exclaimed Mildmay, “I fear no *sharks* but *land ones*. I was once food for the *law*; a rascally attorney made a hearty meal on me, but he pays for it now; he is stowed *below*, with the rest of his crew, roaring *ho!*, I warrant, where there’s still a *warm birth* for *you*, Master Dalton. No offence, I hope.”

“Take care, Captain,” said Justice Blunt, “there’s no joking with the limbs of the law. They are edge-tools, and you may cut your fingers, in having a cut at them.”

“I’d rather have a cut at any thing else

at present, so order a cloth for me in the next room, and I'll lay in like a fox-hunter, nephew."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried the Squire, "meaning *me*, I suppose? The Captain is sharp set, I find, and must have a cut and a slice at one of us."

"I want a slice of what I can digest better than the law or a fox-chase, and I think that *reason*, *law*, and *justice*, will decide in my favour."

"The Captain's orders mun be obeyed, Sir William," said Doctor M'Lancie.

"By all means, Doctor," answered the Baronet. "It is our duty to obey the commands of our senior officer."

"So it is, boy," cried the Captain. "I am proud you pay a due deference to *rank*."

"If you go by rank," cried the Squire, "Lord Armsfield should be commanding officer."

"Your pardon, Sir," replied his Lordship, "*rank* takes precedence of *title* always."

"How do you make that out, my Lord," returned the Justice; "an't they one and the same thing?"

"By no means, Sir," said his Lordship, "Not many years since I myself was a Cap-

tain in a regiment of heavy dragoons, and my commanding officer was a *Lieutenant-Colonel*, who had risen by long service, and merit, from the ranks. There was an *Earl* in the corps, who was Lieutenant under me, who am but a Viscount."

"Right, my Lord," cried Captain Mildmay; "you understand those things; but how should a mere country gentleman who was never at sea, know any thing of rank and precedence? 'tis out of his latitude. But odso, a bumper, niece, if you please, and I'll leave you all to chew upon the subject, while I chew something more substantial than mere argument." And the Captain left the company, to engage a nice loin of veal and ham, to which he paid profound attention. In about a quarter of an hour he re-entered, and, taking a chair, cried, "I'll sit next my little *Ugly-Face* here."

Mary immediately made room for him.

The worshipful Squire was expatiating at large on the power and abilities of his horses, that they were all blood, for he was very particular as to their pedigree. His brown hunter, *Nimrod*, he instanced in particular, who united in his own person, the bloods of Rockingham, Duncannon, Highflyer,

Regulus, Eclipse, and the Godolphin Arabian.

“ On ma word,” exclaimed the Caledonian, “ ye ha’ produced, Squire, a mast respectable genealogy for the major peart of yer family. And the grand-sires of yer favourite Nimrod, doubtless, had imperial blude i’ their veins, descended at least fra’ Caligula’s *Incitatus*, wha indubitably sprang fra’ the famed *Bucephalus* of Alexander, wha was beyond a doubt an *Arabian* of the first rank, that being the indigenous soil of those noble animals.”

“ I don’t remember,” answered the Squire, “ those names you mention in the *Racing Calendar* ; did they ever run at Newmarket ?”

“ I fancy not,” said Sir William ; “ but his Lordship can inform you better.”

“ Upon my honour, Sir William,” replied his Lordship, “ you have applied to a very disqualified decider of that intricate point ; but Bucephalus, or his progenitors probably won many a prize at *Olympia*, whence the *Olympic Games* took their rise.”

“ *Olympy !*” cried the magistrate, “ where is that ?”

“ On the continent, Mr. Blunt,” returned

the Nobleman, with a smile ; “ a kind of *Grecian* New-market, famous for *chariot-races*, and various other sports.”

“ *Chariot !*” exclaimed Blunt : “ could they drive four in hand ?”

“ *Frequently !* but usually only *three* abreast.”

“ *A-breast !*” cried his worship, “ ’Pshaw ! they are bunglers ; not the true *bang-up*. Could they manage a *tandem*, think you ?”

“ I doubt *not*,” replied Lord Armsfield. “ We certainly excel in that particular.”

“ Ay, ay,” returned the Squire. “ I thought so ; these foreigners are no match for us English at all, in any thing. What other sports had they, my Lord ?”

“ Wrestling, boxing ; but they fought with *gloves !*”

“ *Gloves !*” exclaimed Blunt, “ the poltroons !”

“ You mistake there, Sir,” said his Lordship ; “ they were powerful and active men, of tried resolution. Those gloves were gauntlets, bound with iron, and very ponderous. Some of those fellows have been known to fell an ox to the ground with a single blow.”

“ Ay !” said Blunt, “ no matter ; I’ll

back Cribb against any of them for five hundred, any day."

Here this subject was dropped, as tea and coffee were brought in.

"But you have not related, Uncle," said the Baronet's lady, "your morning's disaster."

"'Twas aw owing to the Captain's profound skill in horsemanship," said the North Briton, with a sly gravity; "for I mun suppose he thought he was mounted on a *sea-horse*, as he seemed detarmined to treat *Thetis* to an aquatic excursion, which she as resolutely refused."

"Confound the jade, you must change her name, nephew; she is a disgrace to it," cried Captain Mildmay. "I thought I had got into a safe birth, when I mounted her deck; but, rot her timbers, she had scarcely got knee deep, when she began to plunge and flounder about, grew quite unmanageable, and wou'dn't obey helm. At length, the saddle heeled so, that I fell *overboard*, that's all; so laugh, if you please, you're welcome."

"The Captain was thinking of another great Commander, *Alexander*," said Sir William, "at the time he spurred old *Thetis*

forward, and doubtless exclaimed with him,

“*Bear me, Bucephalus, among the billows.*”

“I neither said nor thought any such thing, nephew; but I wished old Thetis with Davy Jones, from the bottom of my soul. I never will venture out on her again. You had better break her up, she’s no longer fit for service.”

“No, uncle,” replied the Baronet, “I’ll lay her up in ordinary, in memory of her past services.”

The ladies now moved to the drawing-room, followed by the Viscount, Mr. Forester, and young Squire Richard. They were shortly after joined by Sir William, and Doctor M’Lancie, while Captain Mildmay, the Justice, and Lawyer Dalton stuck to the bottle.

Viscountess Armsfield, and the Barrister, kept Mary in countenance and conversation. Mrs. Mildmay, and her niece, Lady Rosebury, took for their partners at cards, the Viscount and the Doctor. Sir William and Mrs. Butcher were engaged in listening to a variety of news from the oracle of information, Mrs. Euston, while young Squire

Richard was entertaining the two Miss Simplers with an account of a duck-hunt, a favourite pastime of his ; and they, in return, giggled and smiled at every third word he uttered.

Lady Armsfield looking earnestly at Mary, heaved a profound sigh, which somewhat startled and surprised her much. The Viscountess perceiving her alarm, exclaimed, “ your person and features so forcibly remind me of a once near and dear relative ; but now, alas ! lost to me and to her friends ; that sad remembrance will sometimes obtrude ; but I beseech you, my dear Miss Irwin, whenever you catch me at this involuntary rudeness, to call my attention to some object that may avert those thoughts, at once most painful and unavailing.”

“ I am truly unfortunate,” replied Mary, “ to be the unwilling occasion of giving a moment’s uneasiness to your Ladyship ; and I——”

“ You are not, my sweet girl,” returned her Ladyship : “ it is, perhaps, my *own* wayward fancy, that creates the personal likeness ; may you never resemble her in conduct or disposition ! yet, I confess, it grieves me to behold a young lady, born to far bet-

ter expectations, reduced to the necessity of embracing a profession so very much exposed to observation, and rude gaze."

"Miss Irwin's talents are of the first order," said Mr. Forester, "and your Ladyship will agree with me, her merits will very soon entitle her to a *London* engagement ; for she is already superior to most there. In town she will be more secure, and less liable to undeserved and ignorant reproach ; for your Ladyship must know, it is not the profession, considered as *such*, that exposes females to temptation. Many, very many truly *virtuous* characters adorn the stage."

"I own it," said the Viscountess ; "I am convinced it is not the *situation*, but the *disposition* that leads our sex into error. But I confess it appears to me, notwithstanding the brilliant talent it requires, to be a very humiliating line of life."

"I understand your Ladyship," the Barrister replied, "and perfectly agree with you ; for, in one instance, it is *below* even the *meanest* and most *servile* occupation. A professional lady and gentleman, of acknowledged and consummate abilities, is liable, at the caprice of every fool, or prejudiced fellow, and who may be bribed for the pur-

pose, though he pay but a shilling for admittance, to be *hooted* and *hissed* off the stage, assailed with *clamours*, *shouts*, *groans*, and *cat-calls*, for the slightest, *imaginary* omission or neglect, and that for nights together: in vain the humbled performer *bends* and *bows*, and *begs* to be heard, till at length reason predominates over intemperance, and the performer is suffered to make a degrading apology, for a fault he never actually committed. Thus situated, the profession is unfortunately *precluded* from holding equal rank with its sister arts; and the only thing a performer has to do, is, by frugality, to render himself independent of public favour and caprice, as fast as possible, which is my sincere wish they all may do.”

Mary, though she never experienced it, tacitly acknowledged the truth and justice of Mr. Forester’s remarks, and resolved, if ever opportunity occurred, to profit by the advice, and retire, if possible, with a very moderate independence, as her views were very limited, and she was far from being avaricious.

“ Pray, Miss Irwin,” said the Viscountess, “ did you prefer the *stage* so much, that you rejected other prospects more eligible. I think, for a young lady left as you were,

a preceptress to the younger branches of some noble family would, in my idea, be not half so degrading."

"No such prospect ; no offer of the kind ever occurred. I was forced, from family circumstances, to be rather prompt in my decision ; and believe me, when I assure your Ladyship, it was no vanity that led my choice to the theatric line. I felt conscious, I possessed not sufficient qualities or experience for a governess, and I might have waited a considerable time, ere such opportunity presented ; as it was, I had no time to lose, and having a partiality for dramatic productions, I had perused them with pleasure. I ventured to hint to that gentleman's relation, his aunt Forester, the *stage* as a *resource* ; she approved it, and directed my studies to that end. To her taste and judgment am I indebted for every present advantage, and to her invaluable correspondence, for the most important counsel and direction through life. I should be truly forlorn, and a lost creature, were she to withdraw her countenance from me."

"That she never can, Miss Irwin," said young Forester. "I know my aunt's judgment could never lead her to form an erro-

neous opinion, and where she forms a predilection it must be lasting. I confess myself a sad culprit, and deserve to be discarded by her ; for I have neglected to keep up a correspondence with her as I ought. Business is no efficient excuse. I have promised myself the satisfaction of seeing her repeatedly, in some of our long vacations ; but the circuit I usually attend is remote, and something always detains me. I am ashamed of myself, I own ; and shame for past error is the first step towards amendment."

" Ha ! ha ! ha !" roared Sir William, " this is surprising."

" Oh !" cried Mrs. Butcher, " I can't believe it."

" Nothing is more likely," replied Mrs. Euston. " I am sure I would not mention it, if it was not fact."

" What ?" asked Lady Rosebury, " something curious, or it would not come from Mrs. Euston."

" Then you must know," said the Baronet, " that the disturbance and disputes between the two rival theatres of late has been a mere political manœuvre, and *Booth* made the tool and machine to work with, by engrossing the public attention in large cha-

racters through every street, thereby to divert their thoughts from the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus Act*: so Mrs. Euston informs us, and such is her opinion."

"It is a cruel and a wicked thing in government to sew up people's mouths in this manner," continued Mrs. Euston. "I have no patience, to be obliged to sit a whole evening with our finger on our lips, or be compelled to weigh every word, as the Doctor weighs every pinch of snuff between finger and thumb, before he applies it."

"Yer perdon, my gude Lady," cried the Scotsman, "I use a *spune*; and though I acknowledge I sometimes weigh ma wards, I mun confass wi' ye, that it is a sad misfortune for the public, and particularly for the *ladies*, to be obliged to *think* afore they speak; and I feel truly sansible of the jeopardy in which *you*, my dear lady, may be innocently involved."

"It is certainly the severest tax upon John Bull, and much more irksome than the Income or Property Tax. Pcor John must not dare to grumble now, nor complain of want of food and employment, lest a *Lettre de Cachet* be sent him, as a prescription, which you must agree with me, Doctor,"

said Sir William, “ is at best but a quack, though patent medicine, and very dangerous in its effects.”

“ I agree wi’ ye, Baronet,” returned the Caledonian, “ that the state physeecians seem ignorant of the British constitution, and may be denominated quacks in a metaphorical sense ; for the remedy they have resorted to, is worse than the disease. They have mistaken the symptoms, and have fancied the body politic in a high *fever*, whereas it is suffering from a cause diametrically opposite, *inanity*, the want of wholesome exercise in employment, and proper nourishment in consequence.”

“ There, there, my lord,” cried Sir William. “ You hear what Doctor M’Lancie advances ; and what remedy would you prescribe, Doctor ?”

“ With aw’ due submission to yer superior skill, as an M. P. though I have the honour to be an M. D. I shall decline giving any prescription, till I am called to a consultation. But I verily believe o’ my conscience, ye ha’ brought the present subject forward, with a traitorous and malevolent design to devart my attention from the cards in my hand, and that it was less the intan-

tion of the ministers to conjure up an *ignis-fatuus* in the theatre, by calling off the people's mind from the habeas corpus suspension, than it is a deep-laid scheme of yours to distract my intellacts, and mak me lose the rubbers, in which, like yer predecessors, ye have succeeded to yer wish, for I'll play na mare."

"*Ha! ha! ha! ha!*" was echoed round the room.

"Laugh as muckle as ye like," cried M'Lancie, taking a copious spoonful of his favourite Gillespie, "*they weel may laugh, who win.*"

By this time, the Squire, the Captain, and the Lawyer had finished their wine, and joined the company.

"Come," said Mr. Forester, "I humbly move a suspension of the present subject; and for the sake of *harmony*, let us adjourn to the *concert-room*. As many as are of that opinion, say *aye*."

"*Aye, aye, aye!*"

"Of the contrary cry, *no*; the ayes have it."

"*Content*," cried the Viscount, and they all immediately adjourned.

The Viscountess presided at the grand

piano. Mary was prevailed upon to touch the *harp*. Lord Armsfield led as *first violin*, Sir William the *second*; the Lawyer took the *tenor*, and Doctor M'Lancie made choice of the *violoncello*, on which he was a great proficient. The Squire could not help laughing, and said jokingly, "You're right, measter Scotsman; I never knew one from your country, who did not mind the stops of the great fiddle."

The Caledonian was going to make a keen reply, but was engaged in tuning his instrument to the proper pitch. He only shortly observed, "that country Squires, though they might be justices, were no *judges*, at least of music, and as he was no *Handel*, his worship might spare his remarks."

"*Handle!*" cried Blunt, who was somewhat elevated; "who wants to *handle* any of your catgut? I can wind a *horn* with any of you; and, in my mind, no music comes up to a pack of hounds in full cry."

The Barrister was a capital performer on the German flute, and the concert opened with the celebrated overture to *Oscar and Malvina*.

When that overture was ended, "Come," said Captain Mildmay, "let us have a song;

and to show you I'm no churl, I'll give you *The Origin of Gunpowder*. 'Tis all in my way. I don't understand your *quiveranties* and *squallanties*; one minute running up to the top of the mast, and the next down to the cock-pit with the *Doctor's bass*. I'm for plain, straight-forwardsailing. But ring for some grog, nephew, first I'll wet my whistle and rosin my bow, and then—"

"Shall we accompany you, uncle?" said Sir William.

"No, no, avast there, none of your fiddle-de-dee for me, you'll only put me out; but you may bear a hand or a bob in the chorus, if you like, and welcome."

The commander, as soon as he emptied a tumbler of stiff grog, began, and went through the song in tolerable tune and time. If he did not evince much taste and execution, he sufficiently proved the strength of his lungs, which resembled a speaking trumpet.

The Captain then requested Mary to oblige the company. She immediately complied, and gave a favourite air, which she accompanied on the harp. The duet of *All's well*, was given by Sir William and the Doctor; another overture was then played, with

much precision, and then several glees were sung by the Lawyer, the Barrister, Sir William, and Doctor M'Lancie, in which the fine voice of Mr. Forester, as counter-tenor, and the Caledonian's strong and mellow bass notes, were conspicuous. The whole concluded with *Rule Britannia*, and the *National Anthem*, which highly delighted the son of Neptune. We must not forget to mention the young Squire, Richard, who, by his father's order, gave *Old Towler*, with such effect, that he made all the dogs within hearing set up their throats, so that it was impossible to determine *which* performed best.

"Bravo, bravo, my boy," exclaimed Squire Blunt; "you have distanced all; no chorus to equal *yours*."

"By all the powers of harmony," cried M'Lancie, "the young gentleman is a perfect *Orpheus*. He has not only roused the attention of the *brute* creation to sympathetic feeling, but no heart of stone nor of oak can remain unmoved. Sic moosic, in the words of the poet,

'Must soften rocks, and bend the knotted oak.'

Nae wonder it has sic an effect o' the young

ladies beside him, for, gude troth, they seem almaist *beside themselves*." The fact is, the Miss Simplers had their handkerchiefs to their faces, to hide their risibility.

The company now moved to the supper-room, where those who were so disposed, took a Sandwich, or some other refreshment, before they separated for the night.

They all met at nine next morning to breakfast, after which Mary ventured to hint to her friend Mrs. Mildmay, that her presence was indispensable at the theatre; though her name was not in the week's cast of plays, the Manager would certainly miss her from rehearsal, which might cause a misunderstanding with him, she wished to avoid.

Lady Rosebury immediately acquiesced, and having first shown her the private theatre, very neatly and appropriately fitted up, to hold about five hundred persons; and some jokes having passed about Mrs. Butcher undertaking the part of *Mrs. Bundle*, in the *Waterman*, and Captain Mildmay *Sir Christopher Curry*, in *Inkle and Yarico*, the pieces were postponed to a future opportunity, and Sir William and Mr. Forester having some little business in town, every

thing was settled. The Captain and his sister remained with their niece at the Park, the carriage was ordered, and the Baronet and his friend conveyed Mary home, and set her safely down at her lodgings, about half past eleven.

She lost no time, but went to the theatre. Luckily she had not been sent for, nor were her services wanted, as it was only a musical rehearsal ; though she could plainly discover, the Manager was ready for a breach, had any occasion offered.

Miss Thompson whispered her, that benefits were to be *thrown* for, and not fixed in this town ; and to-morrow evening was the time appointed, as it was to be a very short season, and not half the usual time allowed to make interest.

Mary asked her how this happened.

“ Some whim of the Manager’s, I suppose, to prevent grumbling. And now, my dear girl, if you have the good luck to win the first night, it is the best by far.”

“ Should I win it,” replied Mary, “ I will with pleasure resign it to you, for I am pretty secure in my interest.”

“ So you thought *before*. Therefore, you

shall not part with your chance," her friend made answer, "on my account."

The evening came, and Miss Thompson won the first. Mrs. Crawley bit her lips till the blood came.—“*Thank God!*” cried the grateful and delighted girl.

CHAPTER XXI.

Nothing could be more agreeable to the disinterested heart of our Heroine, than her friend's gaining the important night coveted by all. The impatience and anxiety shown by every performer when they threw, and their chop-fallen countenances, when disappointed of their hopes, plainly told the value they set on it. The poor girl was out of her wits for joy, and the gentlemen; though evidently chagrined, politely congratulated her on the occasion.

Mary determined to second, by her little interest, the fortunate chance that had fallen to her friend. She, unknown to her, dispatched a letter to Mrs. Mildmay at the Park, requesting her to speak to Sir William and his lady, and to prevail upon them and their friends, particularly Dr. M'Lancie, to assist Miss Thompson at her benefit; adding, how happy it would make her, to find so worthy a girl countenanced and supported. She then launched forth in Miss Thompson's praise, explaining how much she was in-

debted to her for her cheerful society and friendly counsel, extolled the goodness of her heart, and, above all, observed that she was the sole support of her aged mother, a most respectable old gentlewoman. In short, that she was the best of girls, and a most exemplary daughter. She mentioned that she was of Scottish descent, and distantly related to the celebrated *Author of the Seasons*, though their names were differently spelt.

This letter Mrs. Mildmay read aloud, and then handed it round. All the company present unanimously resolved to support her, on Mary's recommendation ; and the Doctor exclaimed aloud, " Gin she be ony *kiff* or *kin* to the family of the immortal Jamie Thomson, I'll gang to her hoose, gin it were the last *bawbie* I possessed i'the warld. Odso, by St. Andrew, I have hit it. The 92d, or Gordon Heeghlanders, are quartered in the barracks. I ken the Colonel weel. I'll wait on him, and get him to command the bonny lassy's play. He canna refuse his name to the relative of auld Jamie Thomson."

All present applauded the Doctor's intention ; and Mr. Forester, he trusted, Miss Irwin's night, whenever it came, would not

be forgotten ; for this instance of zeal for her friend was so truly disinterested and uncommon, that it ought, when duly considered, raise her in every one's estimation, and doubly recommend her to notice and support.

“ Aye,” cried the Captain, “ so it should, and so it shall. What ! do you think, my tight little *frigate*, my *Rose-bud*, my *Ugly-face*, my *Chick-a-biddy*, shall founder, and sink in sight of port, and plenty of hands to man her decks, and fill the ship as full as it can stow ? No, no. I’ll be commanding officer that night, and if I haven’t a *rattler*, a thumping bumper, and an *overflow*, my name’s not Tom Mildmay, that’s all.”

“ We must obey our Captain,” said Sir William ; “ ’twould be mutiny otherwise.”

“ Aye, so it would,” exclaimed the Captain ; “ I’d bring you all to a court-martial, and sentence every man, woman, and child to be sent adrift in a storm in a leaky vessel, without rudder, pilot, or compass, if ye don’t pipe all hands to keep my little *Pussy’s* head above water.”

Mrs. Mildmay and her brother staid about a week with Sir William and his lady at the

Park, and then returned to the Captain's house.

Shortly after, Miss Thompson flew up stairs to Mary, one morning after breakfast, quite out of breath.

"What's the matter, my dear girl?" cried Mary.

"Joy! joy! joy's the matter. I'll not tell you, till you wish me joy."

"So I do, from my soul," said Mary. "Now let me know, for you are convinced I take an interest in all your concerns."

"I know it, my sweet girl," answered her friend; "therefore I come to acquaint you. I have got the bespeak of the Colonel and officers of the ninety-second regiment in the barracks."

"Indeed! I am happy to hear it, this and the night will fill your house; how came it about?"

"The Manager first informed me. It seems, he slyly waited on the colonel himself, for the honour of his name to a stock-night, previous to my benefit, only think of that."

"It is just like him, and like them all, I fancy," said Mary; "but proceed."

"The Colonel refused him, alledging he had pledged himself and his brother officers'

interest to a Scots gentleman, a friend of his, for Miss Thompson's benefit. So the Manager went away disappointed, and came to my lodgings : he rated me roundly, as if I was guilty of a crime ; I denied all knowledge of it, as I very well might ; this enraged him so that we came to high words : in short, I shall leave him at the end of the town. Now, who in the name of wonder can this Scots gentleman be, who told the Colonel I was related to the great author of the Seasons ? for, so the officer informed P——. I am sure, no creature in this town knows it, but yourself."

" I might have, perhaps," answered Mary, " inadvertently mentioned it at the Park, where I spent a very pleasant day ; and I am sure, I had no idea of it's causing a breach between the Manager and you."

" A fig for the Manager now," cried Miss Thompson. " I shall have a few pounds in my pocket, no thanks to him, which will take my mother and me to Bath."

" To *Bath* !" cried Mary.

" Yes, my dear," said her friend. " I have been in treaty some time, and now shall accept the terms. I sincerely wish you were going with me."

“ Most sincerely do I wish it,” sighed Mary ; “ for I believe I never felt myself lonely, till now.”

“ Never mind, I’ll mention you, and tell you when to write for a situation, and inform you when there will be a vacancy. Nay, never droop, we shall meet again, I warrant.”

Mary, when Miss Thompson left her, felt herself unusually dejected. She could not account for it ; she laid it at length to the apprehensions she entertained of so soon losing the society of that worthy and amiable girl, and she was sunk into a deep reverie, when the postman’s knock roused her, and she heard her name. The letter was brought to her. She knew the hand, it was the long expected one from Mrs. Forester. She was with impatience going to break the seal, when a *black spider* crawled from under the envelope upon her hand. She shook it off and shuddered ; the letter dropped from her, and a sudden dimness seized her eyes, and she was near fainting. She took a glass of water, and threw herself on the couch to recover herself.

Something struck her, all was not right at home ; some sickness, or some *death* perhaps,

she could not conjecture what. Great as her impatience at first was, she now dreaded to open the long-wished-for letter from her friend, lest it should confirm her fears, fears apparently groundless, and which she had no reason to entertain. Still her heart misgave her, and she, when a little recovered, made three ineffectual efforts to stoop and pick it up; and when she succeeded, her hand trembled so, as she broke the seal, that she was really compelled to lay it down, before her sight and her nerves were sufficiently steady to enable her to peruse the contents.

She saw it was long, and closely written, neither did it appear to have been written at one time, as there were several breaks in it; and by the colour of ink of different shades, it plainly told, it was penned at different periods, and that it was probably began some days before it was concluded, this made her doubly anxious to satisfy her impatience, as she judged the contents were of importance. She now took it up, and read as follows:

Mrs. Forester to Miss Irwin.

Slope Lawn Cottage,
Wednesday, 18th October.

“ My beloved Girl,

“ I have hitherto delayed answering your last, in the hope of being able to furnish you with some intelligence respecting your relatives in this part of the world, for I am loth to call them by the *near* and *dear* appellations of *aunt* and *sister*. The infatuated woman, for I think I have before informed you, has, it seems, resigned all her property up to the care and management of her spiritual guide, and now entirely resides at his house, and is domesticated with his family. Old Mrs. Saintbury is now confined to her room, with the jaundice and dropsy, from which there is no prospect of her recovery. Three times a day does her pious husband pray by her bed-side, that she may be speedily released from her affliction, in order to expedite which, he has, within this last month, with-held her *stomachic cordial*, alledging, it would but feed her complaint; whereas he is well aware, it is the only comfort that has hitherto kept her

alive ; but now her dissolution is apparently fast approaching. The grief of this consummate hypocrite is so overstrained and barefaced, that I am astonished Mrs. Gordon, your deluded aunt, blind as she is, cannot see through it. Hester has now the sole domestic management of his house, and her sanctity increases with her *size*, which I am sorry, very sorry to observe. Your aunt, for I very frequently call in there, to purchase some tea and groceries, has often requested your sister to take some medical advice, as her looks have been considerably altered of late. This, I myself could not help observing.

‘ My poor Hester,’ cried Mrs. Gordon, to me one day, ‘ pays too much attention to the shop ; she never stirs out, unless to the meeting. She is continually sighing ; and so pale, and then so red at times, when I look at her, and beg her to send for a Doctor ; but the good Mr. Saintbury, that heavenly man ! he is the true physician both of soul and body, for the cure he has undertaken himself, and has mixed her up a bottle of stuff, which she will take from no hand but his. ‘ But still, I think,’ said your aunt, ‘ it has had no effect as yet.’ As I cast my eyes

on your sister, how her check burned ! and then a deathly paleness succeeded. ‘ Yes,’ returned I, ‘ I see she is not well, far from it ; and I would advise you, by all means, to apply to a regular practitioner.’ ‘ Law, aunt,’ cried Hester, ‘ how you go on. It is only a *bilious* and a *windy* complaint that swells my stomach at times so, I can hardly bear myself, but I am very well in general.’ I only replied, ‘ I was glad to hear it was nothing *worse* :’ but advised her to be cautious how she tampered with her constitution. I then wished her a good day.”

Tuesday, 24th October.

“ Mr. Percy has just brought me a letter he received from you yesterday, enquiring the reason of my long silence, to which, *this* must be my answer and apology. I am exceedingly rejoiced to hear of our dear Edward’s promotion, and that he is likely soon to return to England. It is impossible to think how gratified Mr. Percy is with the account ; and when I told old Ann, who was Edward’s nurse, I thought the old woman would have gone crazed with joy. She is quite well and hearty for her years, and lives with her relations, but declares if

ever you get *married* and settled, she will make it her request to *live* and *die* with you. Doubtless your brother has anxiously enquired how his sisters are now situated; you may relate where Hester resides, her present employment, and the change in her religious sentiments, at which, I think, I see Edward shake his wise head, and augur no good from it. I trust we both may be mistaken. For yourself, I see no reason why you should refrain from explaining the motives which led you to embrace your present line of life; and though he may entertain the usual prejudices against the profession, you may beg him in his superior wisdom and experience to point out any other way in which you can earn an equal competence; if so, request him to settle you therein. I fancy the noble Captain would feel equally hurt, were he to see you behind a counter, selling a cap or bonnet, or measuring a yard of ribbon or tape, as a petty milliner in a market town to a country customer; or, if invited to some nobleman's or gentleman's house to dinner, he were to find you seated at the *second table* with the younger branches as their *governess*. It is very easy to find fault, and object to many callings, but it is

not so easy to point out an adequate or more eligible employment, especially with your very limited means ; for you well know three hundred pounds is the whole amount you are entitled to, when of age ; he will, therefore, though he may be angry at first, when he reflects a little, be more reconciled to the step you have taken ; especially when you have acquainted him, you did not proceed, unadvisedly, nor without *my* concurrence, and the sanction of Mr. Percy. He well knows we both have your welfare and interest at heart, and that we could never consent to any measure prejudicial to your future prospects.”

Thursday, 2d November.

“ I was interrupted by a visitor on some private business, which I have been adjusting these few days past, and at length to my satisfaction. I know you will rejoice when I inform you it has added a small addition of fifty pounds per annum to my income ; and to this, I am indebted to my nephew, the Counsellor’s interference, who writes me word, among other pleasing intelligence, that he has had the satisfaction of seeing *you* at his relation’s, Sir William Rosebury. I

will not make you vain, by saying, that William Forester *admires* you. I shall only quote his own words ; that he thinks it a thousand pities, that a young lady of your birth and accomplishments, and, above all, your mental endowments and purity of principle, should be compelled to adopt a profession, so very *humiliating*. These are his very expressions.

“ In answer to which, I shall write him word, whether *you* like it or not, if he really feels so much *pity* for you, it is in his power to take you from it, by giving you a *lawful* claim to his protection ; thus you would, my dear girl, have both law and justice on your side. Oh ! I shall rate my gentleman roundly for this calumny and apparent inconsistency. He, who is a *dramatic* writer, and a successful one, himself to derogate from a profession, which gives *vitality* to his own productions ; without the aid of which, they must have died in the birth, and never have seen the light ! What quibble will this sage Counsellor have recourse to, to defend himself against this charge ? He who can plead so well the cause of others, let me see how he will plead his own, and defend his inconsistency. And I solemnly

declare, if he don't recant, and make the *amende honorable*, by taking the hint, I shall give him, that——”

Tuesday, 7th November.

“ I have been sent for upon a most unfortunate, but I hope in heaven, not an irremediable event. Mrs. Saintbury, poor old woman ! has been released from this transitory life. Your sister Hester sat up with her for the last four successive nights, previous to her dissolution, and on the demise of the old lady she was taken very ill, from the consequent fatigue she had undergone. She was prevailed upon, much against Mr. Saintbury's advice, and remonstrance to the contrary, to have a doctor called in, who took a few ounces of blood from her, when, pray be composed, for I am grieved to be obliged to relate the melancholy truth, it has been discovered that Hester is likely to become a mother ! I was shocked at this intelligence, which the doctor in confidence imparted to me. I cautioned him to keep it a profound secret, in respect to the memory of your respected parents, which he faithfully promised. And now, my beloved, *virtuous* child, you see, you must evidently

behold the hand of *Almighty retribution* ! But I will not agitate your mind by further comments. Bear up, I beseech you, and thank your heavenly Parent, who has enabled *you* to escape the snares and temptations laid to entrap your youth and inexperience, in a profession scoffed at by sanctimonious hypocrites, whom Providence, for his own wise purposes, strips of their masks, and exposes them in their naked deformity. —But I will wound your sensibility no more.”

Friday, Nov. 10th.

“ I have seen your sister ; she looks ill, and very pale. With as much delicacy as circumstances would allow, I adverted to her unfortunate situation. A faint blush spread over her countenance, but she persisted in a firm denial of my *cruel* and *unfounded* suspicion, as she called it. I could no longer forbear. ‘ Hold, Hester,’ cried I ; ‘ you are now in a condition no longer to be trifled with. I know it to be *fact* ; the doctor has in confidence acquainted me of your real state. And, though you little deserve it, in memory of your beloved parents, whose death I no longer lament, I will *conceal*

your error if possible ; but to persist in denying it, is not only useless, but doubly *sinful*, as it argues premeditated destruction. You start ; but I have long thought the hypocritic villain, who has seduced you, had hopes to destroy this proof of *his* and *your* guilt ; else, why tamper with your constitution ? as——’ ‘ Hold, Madam,’ cried Hester, ‘ I will no longer deny the truth to *you* ; but I am married to him, be assured.’— ‘ *Impossible !*’ returned I ; ‘ his old wife is not a week under ground, and the pious man is so affected with her loss, that he, as you told me, cannot bear to remain in the house, but has retired for a few weeks to recover from his recent loss. How then, how is it possible you can be married ?’—— ‘ Oh ! Mrs. Forester, believe me,’ she replied ; ‘ when I solemnly aver to you we are, to all intents and purposes, married in the *sight of heaven*, some months ago. Think you, he could otherwise have prevailed over my scruples ? He called Heaven to witness. He gave me a *ring* ; here it is ; he read the *ceremony himself* ; and I know, I well know, he is too *good*, too *conscientious* a man to forfeit that solemn pledge. We shall be *publicly* united, as soon as decency will permit.’— ‘ Oh, Hester, Hester ! too

credulous girl!’ I exclaimed; ‘you are, I fear, *undone*! But as you now have entrusted me with your unfortunate secret, I will not publicly expose this villain, in consideration of your father and mother’s memory; but if he do not fulfil his sacred promise——. Does your aunt, Mrs. Gordon, know of this?’—‘O no, Madam. She *would* not, *could* not believe it.’—‘Where is Mr. Saintbury?’ I asked impatiently; ‘I’ll write to him immediately, and insist on his coming back, and making you his, *lawfully*.’—‘Indeed, Madam,’ your sister replied, ‘I cannot say; he left his house but two days since, and did not tell me nor David Sugar where he was gone to, but bade him to mind the shop and the concerns till his return. He is probably gone to London, as David has told me, he took with him *bills* and *cash* to a great amount.’—I gave an involuntary moan, which my foreboding heart forced from me, and left her, entreating her to be composed, and hope for the best.

“Thus, my dearest Mary, have I been forced to be the harbinger of these melancholy tidings, and much against my inclination. This has caused my long silence; but

judging the news might reach you with aggravated circumstances, I have ventured to disclose the truth. Let us hope, that Heaven will touch this hypocrite's heart, and compel him to do justice to your unfortunate sister ; for, I am convinced, he had no easy task to prevail, and overcome. If so, all may yet be well ; though his character must be glaring to all, but his blind deluded followers. God bless and preserve you, my sweet innocent, from the snares of those deep, designing hypocrites, who undermine and sap the very virtue they seem to adore. Mr. Percy joins in ardent prayers for your safety, and is truly shocked at your sister's unfortunate situation. Farewell for the present. I shall soon write and acquaint you with the event, which I trust will prove more favourable. Oh, my dearest, beloved child ! it now becomes you doubly to apply to your *Heavenly Father*, for strength and resolution to resist temptation, and the many snares that wicked and deceitful man lays for the innocent and unsuspecting. Supplicate, unceasingly, the *Divine protection*, in the true spirit of humility and conscious weakness, and He will never forsake you. Once

more, God in his mercy shield and protect you, my darling girl, prays

“ Your mother in sincere affection,

“ ELIZABETH FORESTER.”

Saturday evening,

Nov. 11.

“ P. S. Miss Steel, the heiress, to whom Mr. David was to have been united this last week, but for the death of old Mrs. Saintbury, has not been seen in the town this *last fortnight*. Perhaps the impatient girl is offended that death should so rudely step in, and postpone her nuptials with that accomplished and fascinating youth. David himself seems in sad perplexity, and all in the house appear now to be devoted to their *temporal* disappointments, but your pious aunt, to whom the affairs of this world are totally indifferent. Farewell.”

“ Lost and unhappy sister !” exclaimed poor Mary, “ how hast thou and my poor aunt been deluded ! Too plainly I perceive ruin and shame come home to thee. Still thou art my sister, sprung from the same father and mother with myself ; and that consideration has obliterated the wrongs you have heaped upon me. I pity and forgive

you from my inmost soul ! Though never kind nor affectionate, your very nature and my aunt's seemed to have been altered since your acquaintance with that *sanctified fiend* ! Oh ! I could tread the villain to the earth, even as I crushed the venomous insect under my feet, whose touch caused me to recoil and shudder ! True symbol of thyself, for thou hast spun thy fatal web, till thou hast caught thy unsuspecting victims in thy snares. Oh wretch abhorrent ! profligate, unparalleled, and *blasphemous* ! Why sleeps Heaven's thunder ? But I shall see Almighty vengeance yet o'ertake thee !”

Here the poor girl sunk, totally overpowered with grief and strong emotion. Her spirits had received so great a shock at this disastrous intelligence, that it was peculiarly fortunate she had not to attend the theatre all the remainder of that week. Truly and fervently did she petition Heaven, to aid and strengthen her against temptation. “ My sister,” she would sigh, “ apparently fortified by religious devotion against all profane approaches, fell into the tempter's snare. Her *avarice*, I judged, might one day tempt her to make an unhappy and inconsistent *marriage*. But I could not sup-

pose, any sophistry could remove the rigid principles of rectitude, so early and so sedulously implanted in us both, by our angelic mother. Oh, Heavens ! how little can we depend upon our strength ! How need we daily to implore the *Divine protection*, and in the emphatic words of our Lord and Saviour, fervently exclaim, ‘ *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil !* ’ ”

CHAPTER XXI.

MARY was roused from a train of melancholy reflections on her sister's frailty, and the disgrace she justly dreaded, which might involve the name, and reach even her, though so far removed ; for, true it is, that *ill report* flies on eagles' wings, and confounds the innocent with the guilty. The lucky entrance of the lively Miss Thompson dissipated the gloom which overcast her mind, and she listened with real pleasure and satisfaction to the account her young friend gave, of the fair prospect that her approaching benefit afforded.

“ I had a visit this morning, my dear girl,” cried her friend, “ from a true son of Caledonia, a genuine *Sans-Culotte*, alias a brawney *Heeghlander*, who had the modesty to appear before me in dark grey pantaloons, having thrown the phillibeg aside when he left the army. In short, from no less a man than Doctor Andrew M'Lancie ; thanks to the manes of auld Jamie Thompson, my cousin, one hundred times removed. As

you have seen the gentleman, I need not describe to you his youth, his beauty, and personal attractions ! the graceful manner in which he handles his mull, the mellifluous tones of his harmonious voice, which resemble a heavy iron gate grating on its ponderous hinges ! Oh ! such a figure of fun I have seldom beheld ! Now, you shall hear *aw aboot it*," cried she laughing. " By the bye, it is very lucky, I had spent a couple of years between Edinbro' and Glasgow, long enough to pick up a little of the dialect and intonation, and which I now assumed, to justify my renowned descent from that great poet.

" When word was brought me, a tall elderly gentleman was below, and wanted to see me, I ordered him to be instantly shown up stairs, and I met him with a profound obeisance, which he returned with as low a *boo*."

" Gin yer name be Thompson, Miss," said he, " and ye be ainly a fortieth cousin of the immortal bard i' that name, I greet ye wi' the warm affaction of a relative ; for my mither, ye mun ken, was niece to a sixth cousin of his, by the father's side. I honour the name of Thompson as muckle as I do my ain."

“ *Gude troth,*” cried I, assuming the dialect as well as I could, “ I have heard my late lamented father say when I was a *wee bairn*, that his *mithers*, who was a Thompson too, was cousin-germain to a first cousin of that great man.” ‘ Then,’ cried he exultingly, ‘ ’tis as plain as the nose o’ my face, that we baith are near relations.’

“ Then indeed ’tis plain enough,” thought I smiling.

“ I come now, Miss, not ainly to congratulate you on our consanguinity, but to inform ye, I ha’ spoken to Colonel Cameron, of the 92d, who has given me his honour he will bespeak yer benefit ; sae ye ha’ his liberty to put his name, and his brither officers i’the tope of yer play-bill. He wull send to ye for tickets, and I now request ye to furnish me wi’ *two dozen* o’ pit, and half a dozen o’ box.”

“ I immediately supplied him, and the *gude mon* put five guineas into my hand. ‘ Gin ye tak’ my advice, ye’ll give us planty of moosic and dancing. Con ye give us, *The Gentle Shapherd* ? Oh ! that is a maist delightful pastoral drama ?’

“ I am afraid, Sir, our performers are not

sufficiently acquainted with its language, to do it proper justice."

"Mare is the pity," returned he; "then we canna have it, it munna be *murdered*. Yer inhabitants o' the *sooth* are by nae means versed in the pure dialact o' the north. It canna be expected they ken it sae weel, as *ye* and *I* do, Miss Thompson."

"Nay, Sir," I replied, "how should they? poor ignorant creatures; I dare venture to say, not one of 'em ever crossed the Tweed!"

"Oh! ho! ho! pratty travellers!" cried he; "then they are aw ignorant o'the sublime beauties of North Britain."

"'Tis unco true, Sir," I returned, humouring him; "they ha' never had the feleecity of viewing the glorious prospect from Edinbro' Castle. There's a view, Sir!"

"Reight, my gude lass, ye're reight."

"Then the *New Town*! Sir, what buildings can be compared to them! or to *Glasgow* for regularity! Talk of Bath indeed! I ha' nae patience at the comparison."

"Troth nor I," cried the Doctor; "gi' me yer hond, my dear girl; let 'em talk an they wull, there is nae country i' th' uni-

varse, to equal our ain dear Scotland, after aw !” And with another hearty shake of my hand, which he at the same time kissed, the gude mon took his leave. “ Oh ! Jamie Thomson, Jamie Thomson for ever ! I thank you, my sweet girl, for making us relations ; for I’ll be shot, if I know I am any ways, even of the most distant affinity. I might have said so, perhaps, out of a joke.”

“ You must keep the idea afloat still,” said Mary ; “ especially if the Colonel calls on you.”

“ Never fear, my dear,” said the happy girl. “ I have won the Doctor’s warm heart. And nothing could now persuade him that I am not a true *cheeld* of *Caledonia*, and not one drop of English *blude* in my veins.”

“ You must endeavour to please your Scots patrons,” hinted Mary, “ by giving them such a selection as may suit their taste. *Oscar and Malvina*, or *Highland Reel*, with a national interlude or songs.”

“ I’ll rummage up my music, and select a few favourite *Scots* airs, and see what else can be done to please them. Their military band will attend, and we shall have

plenty of national music, I warrant. But I must return home, lest the Colonel should call."

"You must give him the meeting by all means, as another relation," cried Mary.

"Oh no," returned her friend. "I am not going to claim kindred with the Clans, or the Scottish peerage, believe me. Jamie Thomson will do for me; and in return, I'll get his Seasons by heart." And away she ran, and was at home in a few minutes.

The Colonel when he called on Miss Thompson for tickets, behaved with the greatest cordiality and politeness; and left the pieces entirely to her own selection, saying, what was easiest to the company, would be equally acceptable to them.

Her night came; and her house was crowded in every part. Mr. P—— was astonished, and so were all the performers, for her boxes were filled with the principal gentry of the neighbourhood, as the Viscount and his Lady, and Sir William Rosebury, and his family, with his friends were present. Doctor M'Lancie sat along with the Colonel, and enjoyed the night's entertainment greatly, particularly the *Scots Airs*.

Miss Thompson had selected. The officers paid for their tickets with a handsome subscription purse, and she had several presents besides ; in short, this benefit proved of infinite service, as she cleared a considerable sum.

Mrs. Crawley's was the next benefit ; but, alas ! to her utter mortification, she had not a pound over the expences ! for she fell between two stumbling blocks ; as Mary's night immediately succeeded her's.

Our Heroine took care to apprise Captain Mildmay in time, and Sir William's family. Our naval commander now called both *sea* and *land* to his assistance on *his* night, as he termed it ; for he went aboard every ship, and pressed almost every hand into his service, all the sea fencibles attended. In fact, though Miss Thompson's was crowded, Mary's house overflowed in ten minutes after the doors were opened. Guineas were offered for seats in the boxes, and many gentlemen knowing this, in compliment to our Heroine, resigned their places rather than deprive her of such a golden harvest. To say the truth, without exaggeration, as many returned from the theatre, for want of room,

as would have filled the house twice over. Before nor since, never was such an overflow witnessed.

Amid all this pleasurable scene, Mary met with a drawback upon her present happiness. The occurrence in itself was no material injury, circumstanced as our Heroine now was, otherwise it would have been a very serious loss; and we only mention it, to show that there are some dispositions so envious and malevolent by nature, and so pitifully mean in their revenge, that no suavity of manners can soften, no kindness nor favours conciliate. Mary had not time to fold up the superb and elegant dress she wore in the play, as she had to change immediately to another, in which she was to recite “*Collins’s Ode on the Passions.*” She therefore hastily threw it into her trunk, and hurried down with Miss Thompson to the green-room to be ready for her call; leaving none but the dresser, an elderly woman, in her room. When she came back, the old woman was sitting by her fire, fast asleep; as she approached to adjust her dresses, what was her surprise and mortification to behold the splendid dress she had hastily put aside, sprinkled all over with *aqua fortis*! her

ostrich plumes, and wreaths of roses were served in the same manner; and a beautiful aigrette of brilliant paste was trodden under foot, and broken to pieces!

Poor Mary at the sight of this evidently designed destruction, was motionless and mute with vexation; while Miss Thompson exclaimed in a rage, "What fiend! what devil incarnate could do this?" and running up to the old dresser, shook her almost to pieces to awaken her. The woman, when she saw the ruin before her eyes, and for which she was accountable, wrung her hands in agony, crying out, "She was undone, that she would lose her place, which she had kept upwards of twenty years strictly and faithfully, and no such mischief had ever occurred before during her time; that the Manager would compel her to make good the damage, which she would never be able to do; but must go to gaol in her old days!" In short, she lamented so, that our Heroine almost forgot her own loss, in pity for the old woman.

Not so Miss Thompson. She immediately informed Mr. P—— of the disaster, who, to do him justice next morning set every enquiry on foot, but to no purpose; and it

was at length discovered, that—" *Nobody did it.*"

" I wish," cried the Manager, " I could catch this Mr. and Mrs. Nobody, the authors of all mischief. I'd punish them with the utmost rigour of the law. If a chandelier is broke, it is that scoundrel " *Nobody*" did it; if any thing goes wrong behind the scenes, " *Nobody*" is to blame. I wish I could transport them with all my soul far away from my premises; for I'm sure there is nothing but ill luck about a theatre, when " *Nobody is in the house.*"

" But this accident happened, Sir," said Grimes, " when the house was quite *full*, so *Somebody*, not *Nobody* must be in fault."

" Oh! mighty well, Sir," returned Mr. P——, " then find that *Somebody*; and I dare say, the lady will be much obliged to you. You would not call it an *accident*, Mr. Witwould, if the mischief accrued to *yourself*, I fancy. I say, it is a most malicious piece of villainy, and a cowardly act of any one. The person who did it, would not scruple to stab the object of hatred, if equally sure to escape detection. But I'll discover the culprit, if possible; I'll give ten pounds out of my own pocket to any one who can

identify the wicked wretch, who could injure any of the company in that cruel manner."

"I don't suppose, Sir, you would insinuate," cried Mr. Staines with pomposity, "that any gentleman of the theatre could commit such a deed of atrocity, as to injure any lady of the community, that divine sex, the very soul and essence of our existence, and above all that paragon of excellence, Miss Irwin, the fairest of the fair!"

"Cease your bombast," said Sharpe the Prompter; "*sheer envy*, by the gods, and nothing else, has caused this mischief. It is the little mean work of a little contemptible mind, such as no *man*, I think, could be guilty of. Pray, did any lady or gentleman see Mrs. Crawley, or Mrs. Benson, at the theatre, or behind the scenes, last night? for I did not."

"No," was the general answer.

"Why do you ask?" enquired the Manager.

"But for the satisfaction of my thought; no further harm," returned Sharpe.

"Why of thy thought, Iago?" said Staines; "I'll know thy thoughts."

"Ay, come let's hear," cried the Manager. Sharpe repeated these lines in answer:

“ Good my lord, pardon me,
Though I am bound to every act of duty,
I am not bound to all that slaves must answer,
Utter my thoughts.....”

The entrance of Mrs. Benson stopped this quotation, and all eyes were turned on her.

“ Haven’t you heard, Madam,” said Mr. Grimes, “ of the dreadful misfortune that befel poor Miss Irwin last night ?”

“ Mighty dreadful indeed !” returned the old lady ; “ I should like to have such a dreadful misfortune on my night, if an *overflow* can be called such. But I hope in the squeeze and crowd, no limbs were broken, nobody was suffocated, nor any lives lost ; for the press was astonishing.”

“ No, nothing of the kind,” said Sharpe ; “ but Miss Irwin has had her stage dresses and a beautiful aigrette destroyed last night.”

“ Bless me,” exclaimed Mrs. Benson, “ did they catch fire ? and is the poor girl much burnt ?”

“ No, Madam,” said Mary ; “ I am no other ways injured, than having my best dress burnt by *aqua-fortis*, and my aigrette smashed, and trodden to pieces.”

“ I am very happy to hear it is no

worse," cried Mrs. Benson. "I was afraid your dress might have caught fire, and you might have been burnt to death. As it is, you ought to be very thankful, for such dreadful misfortunes will sometimes occur."

"Where were you last night, Madam?" asked the Manager.

"I spent the whole evening with poor Mrs. Crawley," said she, "who is really very ill, and confined to her chamber, and did not leave her, till near ten o'clock."

"That was about the hour Miss Irwin met with the misfortune," said Miss Thompson.

"Well, child!" answered the matron, "can I help that? I am sure I'm very sorry; but where was the dresser?"

"Fast asleep by the *fire*," cried Miss Thompson, "and was not easily awoke."

"I'm sure I should make her answer for the damage I had sustained, if *I* was Miss Irwin."

"Some trick has been played on the old woman; for she has been sick, and ill, and confined to her bed all this morning," said the Manager; "but I'll find it out, if it cost me ten pounds."

“ She got a little merry last night, and fell asleep, perhaps ; if so, it was not the first time, poor old soul ! ” said the *kind* Mrs. Benson.

“ You are very charitable in your conjectures, Madam,” replied the Manager ; “ that old woman has travelled with me these twenty-five years, and I never saw her tipsy, nor heard a report of the kind in all that time.”

“ Miss Thompson and I, Sir,” said Mary, “ had a tea-cup each of mulled wine last night, and left about as much, which we prevailed on her to accept. But I don’t know whether she touched it. At any rate, the quantity could not have affected a child.”

Miss Thompson ran up stairs to her dressing-room, and brought down the tea cups, and warmer ; in the latter were some remains of the wine.

“ Let me see,” cried Sharpe, “ I was bred in the druggist line, and I’ll analyse the contents.” On this, he put it on the fire, and having warmed it, smelled to it, and then tasted it. “ Hey-day ? ” he exclaimed, “ do you take *Laudanum* in your wine, Miss Irwin ? Here is a dose for a *horse* in

this? I'll be upon my oath to the smell and taste. Hand it round, and judge yourselves."

They all agreed it was very nauseous.

Mr. Sharpe then whispered the Manager.

"Aye, do so, and be back presently," said Mr. P——.

"What has been the matter with Mrs. Crawley?" asked Mr. P——.

"She has had no rest these two nights past, and is feverish, I think," replied her friend.

"She should not fret so; but people can't account for their natural dispositions," said the Manager. "Her house was so very thin, she caught cold, I dare say."

"The very look was enough to freeze one," said Mr. Stent; "though Mr. Strutt and I exerted ourselves to the utmost, we could not get *warm* in the business. I don't wonder at her having a touch of the ague."

When Sharpe came back, he said he had been at every chymist and apothecary in the town. And it seems, the one whose shop faces Mrs. Crawley's lodgings, sold the maid of the house, who attends her;

two ounces of liquid *laudanum*, the very day before Miss Irwin's night."

"This may be, but she never mentioned taking any to me; nor is it any thing, in my opinion," said Mrs. Benson, "to the loss Miss Irwin has sustained."

"Nothing," cried Sharpe, "only by *implication*, and *reference deductive*: for instance, if Miss Irwin don't use laudanum in her wine, and Mrs. Crawley takes some to compose herself to rest, then it only remains to be proved, how laudanum could be secretly conveyed into the warmer here, at such a distance, to lull the old woman's faculties, and seal her eyes up close as oak, unless the magic wand of Merlin, or Harlequin's wooden sword was called into play upon the occasion; for the same invisible agent who infused the laudanum, I can prove sprinkled the *aqua fortis* on Miss Irwin's clothes and destroyed her aigrette. This conclusion we draw by implication, and if I can likewise prove that the same girl purchased the *aqua fortis* at another shop, next morning; thus we have a reference deductive, and proof presumptive; particularly if any person saw Mrs. Crawley's maid behind the scenes last night: so that——"

“ Truly you are a most able logician, Mr. Sharpe,” exclaimed Mrs. Benson ; “ and a good lawyer was spoiled in making a *bad* player, and an indifferent prompter, and so your servant ;” and away the old lady walked in a pet.

“ Why, ‘ *let the galled jade wince,*’ exclaimed Staines, ‘ *our withers are unwrung.*’ ”

“ The loss is *mine*,” said Mary, “ and I am the only sufferer. Pray let the subject, and all further enquiry drop ; I hope the poor dresser will not be discharged on the account, and I am then satisfied.”

“ You are very good, Miss,” said the Manager, “ and as you wish it, I shall still retain her ; but she must take no more laudanum, nor mulled wine.”

The company now returned to their respective homes, and Mary waited on Captain Mildmay, to make her due acknowledgments for his patronage ; who seeing her through the parlour window, ran to the door and met her, at the little gate of the Chinese railing. The honest Captain received her with open arms, and with his usual pet salutation, “ Well, my little *Pussy* ; so you are come, Miss *Ugly-Face*, are you, hey ? I think we performed very well, last night,

hey? Walk in. Here are no strangers, only my sister, Milk and Water, and young Forester, the Counsellor; that's all. So we'll have an early dinner, and then we will balance our account, hey?"

The worthy sea-officer then took her hand, and led her in, when she was received by Mrs. Mildmay and the Barrister with the warmest congratulations.

"I have not witnessed so *hot a press*, not since I first went to sea," cried Captain Mildmay quite elated. "I thought I was broiling under a tropical sun, the best part of the evening. My good-for-nothing sister here was so overcome, she was going to leave the house, till I threw a cargo of oranges into her lap; which brought her round, and refreshed her."

"We felt no personal inconvenience, Miss Irwin, be assured," said Counsellor Forester. "We were, on the contrary, highly gratified on viewing the just tribute paid to such eminent talents. I was particularly delighted at the discriminating powers you displayed in the recitation of Collins's celebrated Ode; it is no easy task, especially to accompany the incidental music with appropriate action."

Dinner was soon served, and the wine and dessert no sooner placed on the table, than the Captain moved to his desk, and taking out some papers, with pen and ink, returned with them, and sat down.

“We will, with the Counsellor’s leave, proceed now to business. I hate to be in debt, particularly when a fair lady is the creditor. Let me see, four dozen of box tickets, lower tier, one hundred pit, and two hundred galleries. Just so, all gone off, not one left, um, um, um, exactly thirty pounds, all but a few shillings; which you must owe me. There, there, take these three notes, and seal the payment with a kiss, you jade!”

“Won’t my note of hand do, Sir,” said Mary, smiling.

“No, Miss Irwin,” cried Mr. Forester; “the Captain is not so easily put off, as Sir Peter was.”

“And now, my dear,” said the Captain, after a hearty salute, “we are clear.”

“No, Sir,” replied our Heroine, “I shall consider myself indebted to you and all my friends as long as I live.”

“But, odso,” cried the Captain. “I forgot to tell you, that Sir George and my niece, and the Viscount and his Lady will pay you themselves for their tickets.”

“ And I am commissioned by the Viscountess to inform you, Miss Irwin,” added Mr. Forester, “ that deeming your present situation a too contracted scale for the proper display of your abilities, she has written to one of the proprietors of the first theatre out of London, in your behalf; and as her recommendation is conclusive, you may very shortly expect to have a very eligible offer to join him, which I recommend you by all means to close with.”

“ I am infinitely beholden to her Ladyship,” returned Mary, “ for her kind and distinguished consideration.”

“ I am now about writing a tragedy myself,” said the Barrister; “ and you must pardon me, Miss Irwin, if I declare, that before I had the pleasure of an introduction, or knowing whom you were, or your connexion with my aunt, I have for several weeks past, unknown to you, attended the theatre, on the nights you have performed; and so pleased am I with your peculiar talents, that I have formed my Heroine with a view to exhibit your peculiar powers and your heart-rending pathos; for without flattery, since the days of Mrs. Siddons’s meridian splendour, no actress in my idea, can

compare with you : you are inferior to her in the *terrific*, but surpass her in the *soft* and *tender* touches, or the refined *je ne sçai quoi* of the tragic muse. I am no flatterer, believe me, though you smile with incredulity ; but I am serious, so much so, that when I finish it, I shall send it to you to ———, where I trust you will be settled ; then, after a season, I think I have interest to procure you an engagement in town ; and how happy should I be, if my tragedy should owe its success to your inimitable performance. You see, Miss Irwin, I am not perfectly *disinterested*, in my wish to serve you.”

Mary coloured at this delicate and indirect compliment, and only bowed in return, for she was at a loss for a reply. Something told her, this would draw on a correspondence insensibly, in the way of *business*, which she could not refuse, neither could her heart reject it. She thought of Mrs. Forester's words in her last letter, and she blushed again at the recollection. She sighed, when she mentally ejaculated, “ It is too evident, he wishes me to *continue* on the stage, though it is so *very humiliating a profession*.”

Mrs. Mildmay said, she intended to leave her brother the latter end of the next week, and return to her own residence : she would then have the satisfaction of informing Mrs. Forester of Mary's success ; and would willingly take any letter or message from her, to that amiable and worthy lady.

Mary thanked her, and said she would trouble her with the answer to the last letter she had received from her benefactress ; and the Barrister likewise said, she should be the bearer of a letter, in reply to the one he had received from his aunt two days ago.

Mrs. Mildmay replied, she would be proud of the commission, and very happy to obey their commands.

What was Mary's surprise, when she returned to her lodging, to find a letter to her from the principal proprietor of the theatre the Viscountess had been so kind to write to on her account. It was short, and couched in the following terms :

“ Madam,

“ Understanding from the Right Honourable Viscountess Armsfield, that you have thoughts of quitting your present situation, and, in consequence of her Ladyship's

strong recommendation, and on whose discrimination and judgment I most implicitly rely, I have the pleasure to inform you, a vacancy in your line, particularly the first comedy and some favourite tragic parts, suitable to your years and capabilities, will be vacant in about two months; the two ladies that at present fill those lines, are to quit at that time, the one engaged at *Dublin*, the other in *London*. I do not say, you will be required to fill *both* lines, but every opportunity will be afforded you, to fix on *which*; that, and the public opinion, will direct your judgment and ours. I have only to observe, that the next passport from our theatres royal, is to the winter metropolitan houses. Your answer per return of post;

“ Will highly oblige, Madam,

“ Your obedient servant,

“ THOMAS DAY.”

“ Theatre Royal ———,”

“ How attentive, how good in her Ladyship, thus to recommend me !” cried our Heroine, quite happy. “ How lucky is this offer to save me from the mortification of soliciting a fresh engagement, as the caprice of Mr. P—— is not to be endured: his

favour and his dislike are equally unstable, though he is himself by no means a disagreeable man ; but there are some in the company who have set their faces against me, and I shall not be sorry to leave my only friend, the worthy Miss Thompson, who is about to quit at that time ; and I have no one inducement to remain behind."

A week had not elapsed, when Mr. P—— addressed Mary, as she had just made her exit amid a thunder of applause. " Very well, my dear," said he, " very well indeed, you are improving fast." The word "*my dear*," to which for some time past she had been a stranger, struck her ear, and she involuntarily smiled. " Yes, yes," continued the Manager, " nothing like a good benefit to put a young lady in spirits, and make her alive to the business. You are now once more *yourself* ; and in our next town, to where we shall move in a fortnight——"

" I am very certain, Sir," returned Mary, " I shall not be able to avail myself of that opportunity, for I must return home about that time, family occurrences have rendered it indispensable on my side ; and as your company stands, particularly as a sister of Mrs. Crawley is already engaged to fill my

situation, it can make no material difference to you, nor to the business."

"Very true, Miss ; as you please for that : you are by no means that great object that your vanity might lead you to suppose ; your last benefit has made you proud, but benefits are a mere lottery, ten blanks to a prize. I would not have you plume yourself too much on it ; such a chance, most probably, will never occur to you again, I am pretty certain ; and so, you are going to leave me !"

"It is true, Sir, circumstances compel me. I shall ever respect you for past favours, and most sincerely wish you happiness and prosperity."

"Mighty well, *Miss!* mighty fine, *Miss!* but you must know I can *compel* your stay with me, till the year is expired, if I thought proper ; but, I will be plain with you. I do not think your abilities *worth* contending for, and so, *Madam*, you are welcome to your articles to-morrow, if you like ; but you will be writing to come back to me, that you will. Nobody ever left my company, but what was glad to come back ; but most probably I shall not have a vacancy when you write, I am pretty sure I shan't."

The Manager in a pet, turned on his heel,

and twisted his cane behind his back, and left Mary to digest his last words, evidently the effect of disappointment and chagrin.

Miss Thompson came up to her, just as Mr. P—— left her, to whom Mary related her conversation with him. “Glorious! glorious! my dear girl,” exclaimed that good-hearted creature. “How happy am I, that your discharge came first from *yourself*; for be assured on *Saturday*, you would have received a written one from him: it has been in contemplation some time, but your benefit clinched it, and so did mine; but, thank Heaven! we are both before-hand with him, not but there are many worse men to deal with, than him. And so,” cried the good girl, “you and I must shortly part? Oh dear!”

“For our mutual advantage, let us hope,” replied Mary, seeing her emotion, and almost equally affected. “Let the distance be ever so wide between us, a few days bring our thoughts together in friendly correspondence; let this be our consolation. Distance nor time, I trust, cannot obliterate a friendly intimacy formed upon rectitude of principle and congeniality of sentiment.”

“Oh! Heaven forefend!” cried her

friend. Oh ! never ! never ! but, we must attend business now. The few days we have to remain, let us devote to each other, as far as possible. At any rate, Heaven be praised, there is pen, ink, and paper in the world ; and bless our parents, who had us taught to write.”

“ Amen ! ” returned Mary.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IT was soon rumoured through the green-room, that the Manager had hinted he could dispense with the services of Miss Thompson and our Heroine. Mrs. Benson affected to believe Miss Thompson's going to Bath a mere fabrication of her own; and the censorious old lady went so far as to insinuate, that many ladies found it convenient to make a virtue of necessity, by a temporary retirement. That, for her part, she believed, that reports, however exaggerated, had always *some* truth for their foundation, and *she* was tolerably clear-sighted, though it was not so evident to *other* people.

Mr. Sharpe, the Prompter, with whom Mrs. Benson never was a favourite, warmly replied to this charitable suggestion, "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

That it was evident some persons' optics were so peculiarly formed, that they could actually discover things invisible; and

though their hearing was so very defective, that the loudest prompting, which might be heard all over the house, could not strike the drum of some ladies' ears, yet the slightest whisper or breath of scandal was audibly heard, and re-echoed with peculiar grace and energy. As to my being a *bad* actor in your opinion, Madam," said he, pointedly to Mrs. Benson, "or an indifferent prompter, it is equally indifferent to me what you say ; for I well know of old, you will say any thing to gratify the malevolence of your nature : but I hope I shall never *act* that *bad* part of a traducer of spotless worth and blameless conduct. You would, if possible, underrate my abilities as prompter ; but I defy Mr. Stent's lungs to make any impression on your auricular faculties."

" Really," cried Mr. Grimes, " you are too severe, Mr. Sharpe, you are too severe ; you should have some respect to *age*, and the consequent loss of faculties."

" Loss of faculties !" exclaimed the old lady, in a rage ; " why, you are worse than *Sharpe*. Would you dare to insinuate I have lost my faculties, you wretch !"

" Hold, Grimes," returned the Prompter, " you are a downright libeller. Mrs.

Benson's sight and hearing are most miraculous for her age, for she hears and sees every thing but what she ought."

"Well, I declare," said Mrs. Crawley, "how some people can have the assurance to come on the stage for a season, or a sport, and thus take the bread out of regular performers' mouths, it is really unpardonable; but they are always punished in the end; *something* occurs, no matter what, it is nothing to me, which compels them to drop the vain undertaking; they find the difficulty of the profession, and are too indolent, or otherwise disqualified from the pursuit."

"Come, come," cried the Manager, "drop the subject; there is more talk about this person, than her abilities are deserving of. As to her private character, that is *her* concern. I believe she has been very unjustly aspersed, though she may, from inexperience, have acted somewhat imprudently: at any rate, I am glad she is leaving me, as she has caused a great deal of conversation in the towns, by no means to the credit of the company."

Miss Thompson, who was present all this time, did not think proper to make any reply, as it would have caused a useless al-

tercation. She, however, related to Mary what had passed. And these two worthy girls laughed very heartily at the impotent malevolence of envy and disappointment.

Mary in a few days received a visit from Lady Rosebury, who presented her with ten pounds for the tickets Sir William and she had made use of for her friends and household ; and the next morning, a letter from the Viscountess enclosed a note to the same amount ; for which, in answer, our young Actress returned her ladyship her most grateful acknowledgments, particularly for the flattering recommendation she was pleased to honour her with ; adding, she had received a most polite invitation from Mr. Day, the principal and ostensible proprietor ; to which she immediately acceded by return of post, as requested.

During the remainder of her engagement with Mr. P——, her services were for the most part dispensed with ; for though many performers wished her name to appear in their bills to strengthen their pieces, the Manager objected to it, and inserted the name of Miss Mawkley, the sister of Mrs. Crawley. This lady was young, it was true, but very ungainly ; she was very tall,

and thin, her features coarse, and inexpressive, and her voice inharmonious ; yet with all these defects, the Manager puffed her off in the public prints, and the *gullability* of John Bull was more than ever conspicuous. She was received by the audience in general with shouts of vociferous applause. And though some few ignorant critics in the boxes and pit, dared to differ in the general opinion, and shrugged their shoulders, and almost chatted and laughed aloud whenever she spoke ; yet all she uttered was swallowed by the greedy multitude like sack and sugar. This shows the little dependance there is to be placed on newspaper criticism, and the discrimination or impartiality of Managers in general.

A singer equal to Miss Thompson, might perhaps have been procured, though with much difficulty, but not one who could unite real comic talent to such vocal powers. She was truly a most excellent actress, had a thorough knowledge of her business, an animated countenance, a good figure, and a sprightly *naïveté* about her, as prepossessing as it was unassuming ; and yet, a good benefit, to which her merits always entitled her, seldom came to her share in this com-

pany ; and it no sooner did, than it was sufficient to cause a rupture. We shall not pretend to account for this, but we believe this Manager, *odd* as he may appear, is not *singular* in his notions. Therefore, Miss Thompson was almost nightly called upon ; and, to say the truth, this good-natured girl did every thing in her power to assist the business, and never spared her own exertions, when her talents could render a service to a performer. Even Mrs. Benson condescended to solicit a favour from her ; and though she disliked her, she scorned to show it on such an occasion.

Mary now passed most of her leisure hours at the Captain's, in company with her friend Mrs. Mildmay, who was preparing for her departure, much against her brother's grain, who now grew really pettish, and not easily pleased. " Odd rabbit it ! " he would thunder out at times, " what the plague makes me so partial to a young pussy and an old tabby, that I shall feel myself uncomfortable for a full month after they quit port ? I shall have nobody to plague me but old Martha, who, to say the truth, is a good-natured, good-for-nothing old fool, though she has a spice of the devil in her composi-

tion, when provoked, which not a little diverts me. What a shame, sister, you don't mix some *pepper* in your temper ; you are as *smooth*, as *sweet*, and as *insipid* as *capillaire*. Squeeze some *acid* in it ; infuse some strong *spirit*, and add some *nutmeg* and *ginger*, and you would be palatable. I like good stiff *punch*, because it is a glorious contradiction of ingredients. I can't abide your milk and water, your water-gruel characters !”

“ I hope, Sir,” said Mary, “ you don't dislike my temper ; it is far from being even, I confess.”

“ 'Pshaw,” cried the Captain, “ there's no knowing a young girl's temper till she's married ; *there's* the touchstone. You would not be fit for your business, if you had not some *spunk*, some *fire* in your composition. I warrant, whoever gets you, will have plague enough to manage you. So much the better ; a dead calm is intolerable ; there is nothing like a breeze to fill the sails, and set the vessel in motion.”

Mrs. Mildmay, in return to all this, only said, that she would very willingly swallow a cruets-full of vinegar every day to oblige him with a sharp reply, but she was afraid her

constitution could not bear the application. And for *spirits*, she left the stiff *grog* and *punch* to her brother, and she thought more pepper or all-spice wholly unnecessary, as her remarks were generally *well-seasoned*, and by no means so ill-timed and unpalatable as the Captain's."

Her brother smiled at this, and patting her shoulder, said, "I should like you the better, if you always rubbed me up in this manner."

Mary promised to have her letter to Mrs. Forester ready for her friend to take, against the next time she called on her, which would be in a very few days; and in the morning she sat down, with an intent to answer that amiable lady's melancholy account of her sister, when another letter was brought her, which, by the different post-marks, she found came from her brother, and by the same circuitous round as his first. She immediately opened it, and read the contents :

"My dear Mary,

"I can well judge the reason of your silence; you are ashamed to inform me of the line of life you have precipitately

and incautiously adopted, as well you may ; so you preferred no answer, as you are too honest to deny the step you have taken. But I am well acquainted with your situation, and the imminent dangers you have providentially hitherto escaped. But, believe me, you will never be secure while you follow that truly disgraceful calling. You are openly and avowedly exposed to every rude attack, and men think they have a licence to assail, with indelicate proposals, the female who thus publicly exposes her person for *hire* and *emolument* on the boards of a theatre. Oh shame ! shame ! that ever my beloved, my virtuous, prudent sister, could so far forget her birth and character, thus to degrade herself. You wonder, doubtless, how I have come to this knowledge ; but your wonder will cease, when I inform you, I have been several times in company with a Major Emerson, who, I am happy to hear, extols your prudent conduct in your perilous and critical situation, in terms so warm, that he seems most seriously and honourably attached to you. He appears, however, to entertain no great hopes of obtaining your good opinion, or of prevailing on you to listen to his honourable suit. He has not positively

said, you have absolutely rejected him ; but there is some secret that seems to oppress him much, which he carefully endeavours to conceal.

“ Now, Mary, if ever you hope to retain my affection, you will, most seriously, consider of the advantageous and the highly respectable offer he has made you ; an offer, even in our best days of prosperity, fully equal to our most sanguine expectations, and in your present station, far above what you can ever hope for, or aspire to, and which nothing but the purest passion could prompt him to make, in defiance of his rank, and the vast inferiority of the sphere you at present unfortunately move in. A man of family, an accomplished and elegant man, and a soldier, universally esteemed for his courage and military talents ; surely, my dear Mary, you would be mad to reject him. If so, nothing but an unworthy and degrading attachment elsewhere can be the cause ; which you are ashamed to confess, and which will inevitably sink you in my opinion, and make me ashamed in future ever to acknowledge you as my sister.

“ How happy would Hester be to have such an offer. Thank Heaven ! neither her in-

clinations nor her perverted abilities have led her astray, and plunged her in the direct road to temptation ; to rescue you from which ought to be the sole aim of your conduct. Poor girl ! let me know, how she goes on. Smoothly and quietly, I dare say, secure from the snares you are hourly exposed to, and that is some consolation ; though her rank in society is considerably lowered, she has not voluntarily forfeited it, nor degraded the memory of her parents. Permit me, in your answer to this, which I shall impatiently expect, to promise the Major, in your name, that you will favourably receive him on his return. We shall, in all probability, leave the continent together. Proud shall I be to embrace you as my sister, and the wife of Major, perhaps Colonel Emerson ; but never can I own Miss Irwin the *actress* as a relation.

“ Yours, most sincerely,

“ if worthy of my love,

“ EDWARD IRWIN.”

Mary was in a sad dilemma when she had read this epistle, and the severe injunctions it contained. It totally deranged her thoughts relative to her answer to Mrs. Forester, for

she was loth to mention to that lady the contents of this last letter from her brother. She now found herself doubly incapable of writing an answer to the Captain sufficiently pacifying and satisfactory. She had refused Major Emerson from no motive but the want of reciprocal affection. To accept him now would argue *weakness* and *inconsistency*; nor could she do it, while, on self-examination, she found her heart insensibly drawn towards another object, more amiable in her idea, and more congenial in disposition to herself. This, with a *sigh*, she tacitly confessed, for circumstances led her to suppose, the partiality she evidently felt for the Counsellor was not equally returned on his side. She acknowledged Major Emerson's worth, and sincerely esteemed him. She felt truly grateful for the honour he had done her, but felt no more. She could not, therefore, repent of her conduct towards him, while she experienced no warmer sentiments in his favour, and particularly when a *tenderer* sensation was excited in her bosom for *another*. But this declaration she could by no means avow to her brother, nor could she be justified in so doing, for she had no ground to flatter herself that Mr. Forester entertained

the *same* tender sentiments for her. She therefore postponed answering either letter for the present, till she could compose her spirits and thoughts sufficiently for the purpose.

The next morning she endeavoured to collect her thoughts, but found them vague and confused, and after several vain efforts, she threw the pen aside, and gave up the task as a fruitless attempt. How to inform her brother concerning her sister she was wholly at a loss; she was therefore resolved, whenever she wrote, to be silent on that head. These thoughts, and the idea of forfeiting her brother's love, by rejecting the Major, totally dispirited her, and she felt unusually low and depressed. The postman's double knock startled her, and she trembled all over, which increased when a letter was put into her hand, in the well-known writing of her friend Mrs. Forester. She naturally surmised, the intelligence it contained was of importance, by her friend not waiting for her answer; and she could not doubt but the account was a confirmation of her dreadful apprehensions, if not of some additional misfortune. She hastily opened it, and

found the melancholy truth too clearly developed.

Mrs. Forester to Mary.

Slope-Lawn Cottage.

“Grieved, sorely grieved am I, my beloved Mary, to afflict your heart with intelligence which must rend it; but it is in vain to conceal or disguise the truth. The mask of hypocrisy is fallen, and the *fiend* now stands confessed in all his naked deformity, and your unhappy sister is completely wretched. My heart bleeds for her, and all her faults, and your aunt Gordon’s are now forgotten in the accumulated misery that has overwhelmed them. I will be as brief as circumstances will admit.

“About a week since, Hester and David Sugar were surprised at the abrupt entrance of Miss Steel, the heiress, who rushed into the shop in distraction, exclaiming, ‘Where is he? Where is my husband?’ David approached her with a stupid smile, and cried, ‘Here I bes, Miss, your intended; and where ave you id yourself this month past?’ ‘Stand off, wretch,’ she cried, ‘and answer

me, where is your master, Mr. Saintbury ?' ' I'll ave you to know, Miss, I ave no master now, I bes my own master ; and Mr. Saintbury went to London some weeks ago, to settle some great money matters, before he gives up the business to me ; when you shall be mistress here, as my vife, that's all settled, you knows.'

" ' *Your wife, yours !*' she exclaimed ; ' I am his wife, *his lawful* wife ; we were married in St. Andrew's Church, Holborn, and here is my certificate, duly registered and signed ; but where is he ?'

" ' If he be your husband, he's a villain,' exclaimed Hester in an agony, ' for he has long been mine, in the sight of Heaven. Oh ! you are only come here to insult me. For pity, mercy's sake, unsay your words, your fatal words, for I feel, I feel they will be my death.'

" At this very critical juncture I chanced to enter the shop, and beholding the confusion, ventured to remain. Hester rose to retire, but, overcome with emotion, sunk motionless in a swoon on the floor. David helped me to raise her, and convey her to the back parlour, but the butcher's daughter was too much engrossed by her own feel-

ingsto pay her any attention. She followed us, and beholding your sister's condition, which was too visible to be concealed, she exclaimed, 'Where is Mr. Saintbury? Tell me, oh, if he is not here, arrived at home, I am likewise ruined and betrayed! for he has drawn all my money from the funds.'

" 'What is all this about?' cried your aunt Gordon; 'what are you railing against that heavenly man for?'

" 'Cease, Madam,' cried I, 'any enquiry at present. Let me see that certificate which you hold, Miss.' She gave it me to look at. I returned it with a heavy sigh, saying, 'It is too plain, too evident, you *are* his wife, and the unfortunate Hester is undone by her credulity!'

" 'Poor wretch!' returned the real wife; 'but if my husband is not here, I am as much to be pitied, for I am ruined. We both went to London to be married. I made over *all* my property to him the day after our marriage, and he left me about a week after, to come down here, he said, and dispose of his *houses* and the *chapel* here, leaving me but *ten* guineas in the world, and appointed this the day I was to meet him here, and I am come in consequence.'

" 'Be assured, Madam,' I returned, 'he

left this house and the town, the day after the late Mrs. Saintbury's funeral, and has not been heard of since.'

" 'No,' cried David, 'that he has not; and all I can say is, that he has taken you *both* in, and the old lady there likewise, and the whole *town*, I believe, for he has hopped off with all the money he could lay his hands on, and there is not a day but the creditors are pouring in; so you and they are all *bit*. As vor *you*, Madam,' to his late sweet-heart, 'you are *false-hearted*, and *foresworn*, so serve you right. And now I says, the ouse is *mine*, vor my father was *ground landlord*, and my aunt Saintbury was only *tenant*, and so you, none of you, has any business here, no longer.'

" I told him, neither Hester, nor Mrs. Gordon, should be any longer intruders; that I should take your sister to my cottage, and would settle your aunt in lodgings with some of her religious friends.

" Just as I was preparing to leave this distressing scene, a clerical-looking man, with a formal face, made his appearance. He said, he was the Rev. Mr. Newburn, that he had purchased Mr. Saintbury's title and

interest in his new chapel, and was come down to take possession, for his friend Mr. Saintbury would not return, having set sail for America ten days ago.

“The young bride was now almost in as pitiable a condition as your unfortunate sister, who now appeared a motionless statue of fixed despair. I hastily left the house of sorrow and confusion, to procure a carriage for Hester, who was unable to walk, and to fix your poor ruined and deluded aunt with some charitable and religious friend, to administer to her wants, for which I promised to be answerable. I speedily returned. Your aunt is now removed to her friend’s for the present, and Hester is with *me*. She is now confined to her bed, and this shock will hasten, I fear, a premature labour. Mr. Percy is constant in affording comfort to the now broken-hearted penitent; she has expressed her sorrow for her ill usage, and begs most ardently to see you, before she dies, for, I verily believe, she cannot out-live her shame.

“This is all I have to communicate. Heaven knows, it is too much for your affection to endure. I know on the receipt of this,

we shall soon behold you ; till then, God protect and shield you,

“ My dearest girl,

“ prays your ever affectionate,

“ ELIZABETH FORESTER.”

Poor Mary, prepared as she was for ill tidings, sickened as she read this heart-rending account. At length a copious shower of tears came to her relief, and the next morning early she waited on Mrs. Mildmay, to whom she opened the whole secret, and asked her advice. That worthy lady advised her by all means to follow the dictates of sisterly affection, and to visit the humbled penitent. “ You shall, my dear girl, return with me, and I will set off to-morrow. I have nothing now to detain me here, and the sooner we arrive, the better.” Mary, when she went home, wrote a few lines to Mr. P——, apologizing for her abrupt departure, and wishing him every success. She then waited on her young friend, Miss Thompson, and her mother, to take her leave of them ; observing, that her sister was seized suddenly ill, and required her immediate presence.

In the evening, the two friends separated,

not without many tears and embraces, and a fervent promise of constant correspondence. She then packed up her trunks, discharged her lodging, and went to the inn to take her place in the stage, but found Mrs. Mildmay had already paid for two. Next morning, Captain Mildmay and his sister were at her lodging betimes; they partook of a slight breakfast with her, and they departed for the inn. The naval commander handed them into the coach, and it was evident he was much affected; for as he saluted them, the full drop fell down his sun-burnt visage, and he with difficulty blubbered out, "*God bless you both!*" as the coach drove off.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FAST as the coach proceeded, its motion was too slow for Mary's impatience, whose anxiety to behold her sister, and alleviate, if possible, her sufferings, rendered the length of the journey, and every stoppage on the road, at this time, doubly tedious and disagreeable. Mrs. Mildmay knowing the situation of her young friend's mind, strove all in her power to divert her attention from dwelling on the subject. She enlarged on the pleasant change she would experience, by removing to a much superior company, not only as to respectability, but to the merits of the performers. The proprietors, she said, were gentlemen of integrity, of elegant address, and ample fortune. Mr. Day was very polite, but somewhat formal and consequential in his deportment, and had a great opinion of his own profound judgment of acting, which, to say the truth, was generally correct. The junior partner, Mr. Lilac, was somewhat a *petit-maitre* himself, but perfectly polished in his beha-

viour, and a profound judge of costume and appropriate dress. His little foibles were no ways troublesome, but perfectly inoffensive : he was the very pink of courtesy ; while, on the other hand, Mr. Barlow, the acting Manager, was a downright matter-of-fact man, who spoke his mind, a little rough in his manners, like her brother, but not the worse man for that. “ Now, my dear,” said this good lady, “ I have given you these hints, which I had from the Viscountess, who knows them personally ; that, as you are beginning the world, and have already seen a little of its versatility, you may, by a previous knowledge of their dispositions, be able to conform to their humours ; for, believe me, such acquiescence is expected, and is really indispensable as the world goes.”

At any other time, our Heroine would have been diverted and entertained with the absurdities and eccentricities of some of her fellow travellers.—Among them was a boasting serjeant of dragoons, just arrived from the continent, to whom, to credit his own words, the victories of *Leipsic* and *Waterloo* were chiefly indebted. This bombast displeased an elderly lady, who was never so degraded in her life *before*, to ride in a common

stage coach with she knew not *whom* ; but unfortunately for this lady of consequence, her husband, who was a *farrier*, and formerly belonged to the same regiment the serjeant now served in, and to whom he was known, waited to receive her, as the coach stopped a few stages distant ; and the two great personages left the carriage, to the infinite satisfaction of the remaining travellers.

They journeyed all night, and late in the evening of the next day, arrived at their destination. Late as it was, being past eleven, Mary, accompanied by Mrs. Mildmay, proceeded to Slope Lawn Cottage ; it was a fine moon-light frosty night. Mrs. Forester was very near retiring to rest, when they rang the gate-bell. No sooner were their names announced, than that amiable Lady descended to meet them, and held our Heroine for some time fast locked in her affectionate and parental arms.

Mrs. Mildmay, having taken a glass of wine and some cake, hastened back to her own habitation, where she had stopped to inform her family of her arrival ; and she now left them together, promising to spend the next day with her old friend, Mrs. Forester.

Mary, late as it was, expressed a wish to see her sister ; but Mrs. Forester would by no means consent, saying, the sudden surprise would be too much for Hester. She had besides, fallen into a sound sleep, which she had not enjoyed for many days ; but she was really in a most dangerous way, as the doctor who attended, had declared : therefore, she must defer the interview, till some time in the course of next day ; meantime, Mary took a slight supper, and shortly after retired with her friend and benefactress, to rest.

In the morning, old Ann, whom Mrs. Forester had sent for, to nurse Hester, came into the breakfast parlour. Mary ran to meet her, and kissed the good old soul with true affection, while the poor woman shed tears of joy at the sight of her young mistress. “ Indeed, my dear young lady, my sweet Miss Mary ! my poor old heart has gone nigh to breaking, since the sad mischance that has befall your sister, tho’f had it happened to any other, I should have thought it a just judgment for her cruel behaviour to *you* : who never deserved it of her ; but the *Lord* will, I hope, open her eyes to see her error, and pardon her, I trust.”

“ How is she this morning, nurse ? ” asked Mary, anxiously.

“ She has had some rest in the night, Miss,” replied Ann ; “ but she don’t seem much refreshed by it ; her thoughts keep wandering upon the black *fiend* and *sarpint*, as she calls that wicked *Solomon*. Sure and sartin, it is no sin, to wish he may be swallowed up by the waves in his long voyage ; but all the water in the salt sea ocean, will never be able to quench the flames, that his master, the *wicked one*, has prepared for him : no, never by my truly, and a thousand pities it should.”

“ Do you think, Ann, she is composed enough to see me, without distressing her too much, and making her worse ? We must avoid that, if possible.”

“ I portest and vow, Miss, it is mortally impossible to say, for she raves out suddenly at times, and then sinks into a fainty swoond, so that my old eyes are sore with tears to see her in this melancholic state ; but, if you please, we will wait, till we hear what the doctor first says ; he’ll be here to-day : though by the bye, I think the stuff he gave her, to put her to sleep, has done her no good, for it makes her poor head light and feverish.

Just at day-break this morning, she called out to me, to brush that great black spider away, that was crawling over the quilt. I looked, but could see nothing. ‘*Take it away,*’ she cried, ‘*tread on it, crush it, kill it, or it will kill me;*’ and she hid herself in an agony under the bed-clothes. The Lord be about us ! what strange fancies sickness and fretting fills our poor brains with !”

“ Spider !” sighed Mary : “ yes, I have seen that spider, the dreadful symbol of the wretch who has destroyed her ; but we will wait, as you say, to hear the doctor’s opinion.”

Breakfast was now brought in, and it was scarcely finished, before Mrs. Mildmay called upon her friends.

“ Well, good folks,” cried that agreeable lady, “ How do you find yourselves this morning ? How does my young fellow traveller feel ? We set out together, and we have returned together it seems. - I sincerely wish a different errand had brought Mary here ; but how is her sister ?”

“ She has not seen her yet,” said Mrs. Forester ; “ but I am glad you are come, my dear Madam ; you will help to keep poor Mary’s spirits from sinking under this afflict-

ing misfortune. I will now step up stairs, and see how her sister is ; I expect the doctor every minute, he is pretty punctual, and generally comes about this time." Just as Mrs. Forester was proceeding up stairs, the doctor arrived. Hester was sitting up and wanting to rise, but old Ann was preventing her, when they both entered her apartment.

"How do you find yourself to-day, Madam?" asked the doctor.

"Very well, I thank you, Sir," cried Hester. "How are you?" The doctor shook his head. "But this wicked old woman," continued she, "won't let me rise, and I want to go immediately to town, to *London*, and enquire, if my husband has really set sail and left me ; but I know he has not : they say, he was married too, in St. Andrew's Church, Holborn ; but they tell a shocking falsity. We were married in *Heaven*, many months ago. I can prove it, for the recording Angel entered it in his book, and I have got the certificate ; bring it me, nurse. No, I'll get up and find it myself."

"She raves," said the Doctor, "she must be kept quiet, the critical event I perceive will soon be over ; her pangs are beginning."

The accoucheur then administered a cordial to strengthen her. It had the desired effect, it hastened the symptoms; and after three hours severe struggle, she brought into the world a fine boy, while the exhausted mother sunk apparently lifeless from the conflict she had endured. The Doctor continued some time, till she showed signs of returning animation. He declared her case at present very dubious; all depended, whether the fever, which would succeed, might prove moderate or not. A day or two would determine.—Having left proper instructions for her treatment, he promised to visit her every day, till she was out of danger, then took his leave.

When Hester, from exhaustion, had fallen into a deep sleep, and from the composing draught which was likewise given her, Mary stole into the room, and there beheld the emaciated frame of a sister, who, a few months before, she had left with every appearance of health and strength. “Alas! poor Hester, unhappy sister!” cried the worthy girl; “how dearly hast thou paid for thy *credulity*,—that fatal delusion which steeled thy heart against natural affection! Now, too late, I fear, wilt thou perceive the

frightful snare thou hast plunged into. May Heaven in its mercy pardon, as freely as I, from my inmost soul, forgive you now !” So saying, she stooped down, and kissed the cheek of her slumbering and unconscious sister. She then asked for the child ; she took the little infant in her arms, while tears of sorrow fell from her lovely eyes. “ Poor helpless babe !” she exclaimed, “ the innocent offspring of rooted depravity and repentant shame ! may the sins of thy abandoned father never be visited on thy head ; but may Heaven, in pity, take thee to itself, or spare thee, to make reparation to thy wretched mother, for the injuries thy cruel and impious father has heaped upon her ! and if so, may’st thou live to meet him, and strike his flinty heart with *horror and remorse !*” Overcome by her feelings, she returned the child to old Ann, and descended to the parlour, to recover from the shock this distressing sight had occasioned ; there she found, to her inexpressible pleasure, seated with her two friends, the truly reverend and pious Mr. Percy. She ran into his extended arms, and kissed his venerable cheek. While the good man, with tears of joy, welcomed her return.

“ Here,” cried the devout Pastor ; “ here, ladies, we behold the unerring hand of Justice and of Providence in the striking contrast before us. In this dear girl, we see the blooming effects of genuine and unaffected piety and purity of principle ; while on the other side, we, with sorrow, view the devastation that sin and shame has quickly wrought in a form, once fair and comely, now pining in repentant anguish, and withering with despair ! How is the poor unhappy girl ?” asked he.

“ She is, thank Heaven,” said Mrs. Forester, “ relieved from her burden of shame, not two hours since, and has got a boy !”

“ ’Tis well,” returned Mr. Percy ; “ I am glad it is over, and sincerely trust she may live yet a worthy woman. Heaven is all merciful and forgiving, upon due repentance. Have you seen her, Mary ?”

“ I have this moment come from her room, Sir ; but she is asleep, and I would not for the world disturb her.”

“ As soon as she awakes, and takes some nourishment, let her know, Mrs. Forester, that I am here. She has, I am happy to say, paid great attention to me of late. I have endeavoured to soothe her despair, and

tranquillize her mind, and, I hope, with considerable effect. I will calm her spirits, and prepare her to receive you. You cannot withhold your forgiveness for the injuries your deluded sister has done you !”

“ Oh, Sir, mention them not ; they are long since forgiven and forgotten.”

“ Spoken in the true spirit of Christianity,” replied the divine : “ remember, ‘ we must forgive our brother, not only *seven* times, but *seventy times seven*.’ ”

Mrs. Forester now was told by Mrs. Mildmay, of Mary’s great benefit, and the friends she had gained by her conduct, particularly at Rosegrove Park ; adding, she believed her old brother, the Captain, was half in love with our Heroine ; for she had wrought a miracle, and had softened down his tempestuous temper to a moderate gale. He certainly would have preferred his suit, but for the fear of Counsellor Forester, “ your nephew, Madam, to whom, Miss Irwin seemed very partial. Nay, you need not colour so, for he is a most eloquent pleader, and, I dare say, has advocated his own cause successfully.”

“ Aye,” cried Mrs. Forester, smiling, “ indeed ! How is this, that I have been kept

thus in the dark between you both. Oh, you sly ones !”

“ Believe me, Madam,” said Mary, colouring still more, “ not a syllable on such a foolish subject ever passed between us : and I solemnly declare——”

“ And so do I, as solemnly declare,” replied Mrs. Forester, “ I wish you had him.”

“ Well, I can’t help that,” said poor Mary, forcing a laugh.

“ Well, that is admirable ! How I honour your simplicity and quaint reply. But tell me really, child, how you like my nephew.”

“ Pray don’t ask the poor girl,” said Mrs. Mildmay, archly ; “ she can’t bear him. Don’t you see her cheeks glow with *resentment* when his name is mentioned ? She *hates* him, it is evident.”

“ I do *not* hate him,” answered Mary ; “ but you are very teasing, I must say.”

“ Come, come, ladies,” cried Mr. Percy ; “ have some compassion on a young novice in the art of love. But tell us, my dear, have you left your situation, or only obtained leave of absence on this melancholy emergency ?”

“ I have, through the kind interest of Viscountess Armsfield, obtained a much more advantageous situation under Messrs. Day and Lilac, the proprietors of the theatres royal at ———— ; and for this, I may, in the first instance, thank Mrs. Mildmay, for my introduction.”

“ Oh,” cried Mrs. Mildmay, “ I am afraid you can never survive under the weight of your obligations ; but, believe me, the *merit* is originally *yours*, and yours *alone*, which must force *Stoicism*, and even *incredulity* to acknowledge it. The world, though not very clear-sighted in general, cannot be *blind* to conspicuous talent, and evident rectitude of conduct.”

Poor Mary’s eyes acknowledged her feelings, and she bowed in silence.

The bell now rang. Hester had awoke ; and when she had taken a little nourishment, Mr. Percy and Mrs. Forester went up to her. They remained a full half hour, before Mrs. Forester descended to bring Mary to her sister’s chamber. Hester was calm, and seemingly collected. The moment Mary’s appearance struck her sight, she covered her eyes, crying, “ I am ashamed to see you, sister. How thy eyes can bear to look upon

a fallen creature like me, I know not ; but you were always good, and you are not come to upbraid me. Oh ! will you, can you pardon your poor, dying, but repentant sister ? Too late I see my error. The living evidence of my shame may survive to curse its guilty parents, while I sink into an untimely grave with horror and remorse ; for I feel I cannot survive its father's perfidy."

" Banish those thoughts, dear Hester," cried the weeping Mary. " I am come to comfort you, to pour balm into your bleeding heart, and heal your sorrows."

" Can you restore to me my lost innocence ? Can you restore to me that peace of mind which I have lost for ever. Oh ! no ; but pity doubly wounds me ; it is *cruelty*, not *mercy*. Withhold it, then, and bless me with your just reproaches. These I can bear, but not your pity. As for forgiveness, I was wrong to ask it ; for well I know, great as your affection is, you cannot pardon such a wretch as I have been."

" I will hear no more of this incoherence," said Mr. Percy : " your present sufferings are the consequences of your former error, and of the conviction which a merciful Providence has implanted in your mind : it is

He who has, in his bountiful compassion, opened your eyes, and raised you friends in your present distressful state. It is impious, therefore, in you, child, witnessing, as you now do, His goodness towards you, to despair of His forgiveness, when true contrition strikes the sinner. Your former friends have not deserted you : for why ? because your heavenly Father has not. Let *that* reflection live uppermost in your poor thoughts ; this will confirm reliance on His mercy, and yield comfort to your afflicted mind. Can we, can your *sister*, refuse to pardon, when your *Almighty Parent* withholds it not ?”

Hester smiled and sighed, as she pressed her sister's hand, who, observing a wandering vacancy in her eyes, notwithstanding the darkness of the chamber, kissed her flushed cheek, and bade her try to rest ; saying, “ Indulge not unavailing and sinful despondence, my dear Hester ; your friends are with you ; I will not leave, but watch you ; all will yet be well.”

Hester shook her head, and faintly exclaimed, “ With you it may, but with me, Oh ! never ! never !”

The Doctor now entered ; he felt her pulse, and gravely remarked, she must be

kept quiet, while he whispered, "The fever is increasing; though there is no unusual symptom at present. Her spirits must not be agitated, her head is affected." The patient having fallen into a short slumber, as they descended, the physician observed, she will be unable, I fear, to suckle her infant; and, circumstances considered, I would recommend it to be kept from her sight, unless its natural aliment flow plentifully, of which I see little prospect; or should she eagerly call for it, in which case refusal would but *irritate*, which must be avoided."

Mrs. Forester made answer, that old Ann, the nurse, was very skilful, and would undertake to rear the infant by hand; which the Doctor advised.

As the fever continued to increase, she grew more restless, and raved considerably at intervals, not violently, but faintly and incoherently. Mary sat up with her, the better part of three successive nights.

The infant was a fine boy. Mary had him in her arms one morning, when Hester starting from an uneasy slumber, raised herself suddenly in the bed, and exclaimed, "See! see! she caresses him! the child of

sin and shame is not disgusting to her purity. Take it away; the touch must contaminate her. He is my torture. Heaven has sent him to be the scourge of my life. I feel convinced of it! Oh! Minister of Justice! pursue his father with thy swiftest vengeance. Oh! strike!”

“Hold, sister,” cried Mary; “forbear! Think not of his father; leave him to Heaven. Be composed, I conjure you.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Hester wildly, “the sight of that little imp *tortures* me. Take it hence, and never let me see it more!”

“Don’t talk to her,” said old Ann; “the milk fever is at its height.”

“Let him die! Let him die!” Hester cried raving, while her eyes seemed bursting from their sockets: “he will then never hear of his *accursed* father and his *miserable* mother; never blush to own them. See! the imp smiles; he mocks his wretched mother. Oh! you are your father to the very life! Ay, ay, turn up your little wicked eyes, and pray, then stab me to the heart, as he has done. Yes, he will be better *dead*, then he cannot deceive, as his father has done. Give him to me; I’ll kiss him first, and then we will smother him; yes, smother him.” And she made

a violent effort to snatch the infant, but was held by old Ann and Mrs. Forester, while Mary, with the infant in her arms, retired from her view. Exhausted with the effort, the unfortunate Hester sunk, uttering a long deep groan, insensible upon her pillow."

Mrs. Forester and Mary remained with her most of the day, and sat up the whole night by her bedside. Her breath was short and uneven; sometimes scarcely audible. The scene was solemn and awful. Towards day-break, Hester gave a long sigh, and in a faint voice, cried, "*Mary!* where are you, *Mary!*"

"I am here," answered Mary, "close by you; and she took her sister's hand, which she found cold and clammy. Can you not see me, Hester?"

"No," with difficulty replied the expiring sister. When, after a pause, "Mary, I am going; when I am gone, my child—the innocent, who will——" And her glassy eyes endeavoured to search for Mary, but in vain. Oh! yet it was a look, wherein volumes were written.

"I understand you," said Mary, nearly inarticulate with emotion, "I understand you; I will see him taken care of."

Hester shook her dying head, and faintly murmured, “No, No, not that—be a—*mo-m-m—*.”

“Mother to him?” said Mary.

Hester bowed her head. “I will,” cried Mary fervently, as she dropped on her knees, still holding the clay-cold dewy hand; “and here I solemnly swear in the sight of Heaven, I will be a mother to this poor babe; nor shall *any force* separate him from me! So hear me, so reward or punish me, All-righteous Power!”

Mary felt a faint pressure of her hand from her sister’s; but the fingers relaxed, and after two or three convulsive sobs, the unfortunate victim breathed her last.

The departed spirit, leaving its garb of frail mortality behind, ascended on the trembling wings of hope, followed by the prayers of Mary: as it approached the pure mansions of eternal day, fear and doubt vanished, when it beheld the receiving angel with a smile, open wide *the everlasting gates*, to admit the humbled and repentant souls that supplicated entrance, and where the devout petition of her pious sister was instantly registered, and wafted forward, as a sweet-scented oblation, at the Mercy-seat!

Mrs. Forester, who had knelt likewise at this impressive scene, now rose, and assisted Mary, who seemed absorbed in pious meditation ; with the most soothing accents of persuasion, she at length prevailed on her young friend to remove from the body, and refresh her harrassed spirits with necessary repose. This worthy lady the next day waited on Mrs. Gordon to relate to her the melancholy event of Hester's death. That strange woman, still cherishing her delusion, received the intelligence with little emotion ; she returned indeed thanks, that her niece was out of a sinful world, and wished it might be soon her *own* lot ; which Mrs. Forester could not help considering as the most rational words which she had uttered for some years. She declined, however, attending her niece's funeral, from the infirm state of her health, which had long been on the decline ; but within the last six weeks, the symptoms of approaching dissolution were too manifest to admit of doubt, and a happy release it must be considered, for a poor woman of weak intellect, ruined in her old age, and reduced from affluence to penury and total dependence, through mistaken principles, and a fatal, misplaced confidence in a villain.

Hester's funeral was by the advice of Mr. Percy, as private as possible ; peculiar circumstances rendered it indispensable, for already the busy and uncharitable tongue of scandal had exaggerated truth. The corpse was, therefore, followed to the grave by Mary, as mourner-in-chief, accompanied by Mrs. Forester, Mrs. Mildmay, and old Ann. The old gate porter, who had belonged to the family, with two former domestics, a butler and a house-maid, who were married, during the late Mr. Irwin's life, and who now kept a shop in the town, formed the whole of the witnesses to this melancholy interment. The service was read by Mr. Percy with that pious solemnity, for which the truly excellent divine was so highly and justly distinguished.

The sight of that grave, which contained the sacred remains of her beloved parents, was a fresh source of affliction to the feeling heart of Mary, and it was with difficulty she summoned strength to support the conflict in her bosom on the sad occasion, till her reverend friend and pastor bringing the ladies to his house, read Mary an exhortation on a patient submission to the wise Disposer of all human events.

When Mrs. Forester with her young friend returned home, Mary took the little infant from old Ann, and kissing it affectionately, exclaimed, "Poor hapless orphan ! I am now thy mother by adoption. I have sworn it, and will keep my word. Thy little hands seem stretched forth for protection with a piteous look. Rest thee, pretty babe ; thy new mother will not part thee from her."

To this Mrs. Forester significantly replied, "It was a praise-worthy resolution ; but Heaven would never expect from her the mere *literal* fulfilment of her oath."

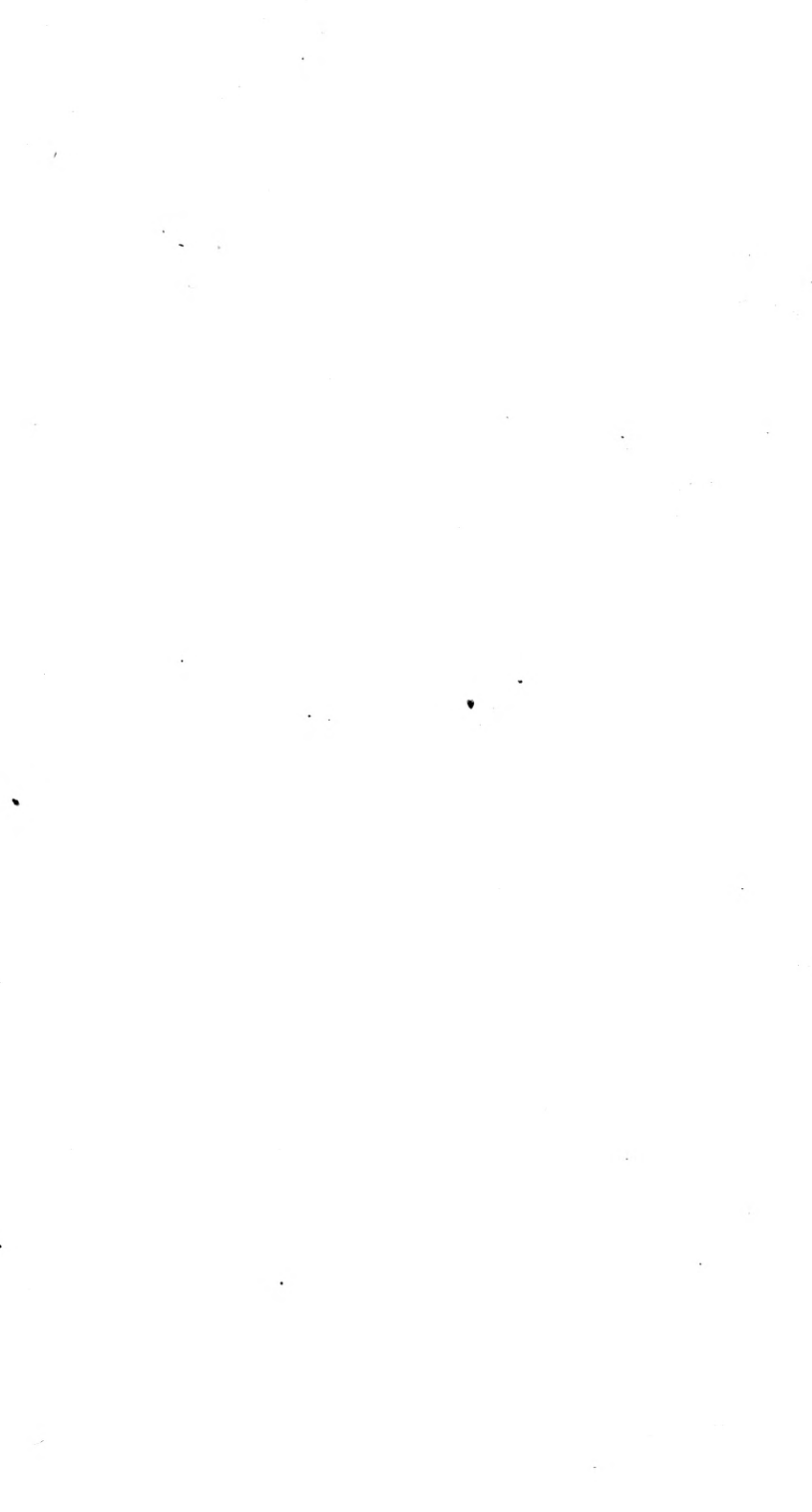
"Have I not voluntarily *sworn* it?" said Mary, "and thereby pacified the last agonies of a dying sister ? What worldly consideration can force me to forget the solemn injunction, and the sacred pledge I have given, — *never to part from it* ; but be to it a mother, can I be *perjured* in the worst degree ? Oh ! never, never !"

"In every tender sense may you fulfil your promise and your oath," returned her friend ; "but prudence requires you should immediately place the child at nurse. I will myself adopt *your* part, and watch its welfare with a parent's eye ; but on no considera-

tion, let it travel with you. This babe, the child of *shame* and of *misfortune*, must eventually bring *both* along with it : they are inseparably united ; and my boding heart foretells, if my advice be slighted, you will too late repent the rash resolution, on which you seem determined.”

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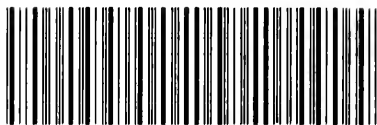








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